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New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann. . . . . (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Pham Gia Khiem, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.

Mr. Pham Gia Khiem (Viet Nam): Allow me first to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I am confident that you will ably guide our session to a great success. I would also like to commend His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim for his important contribution to the work of the Assembly at its sixty-second session.

While the trend of peace, cooperation and development continues to prevail, there have been complex developments in the world over the past year. Local conflicts endure, acts of terrorism still occur in many parts of the world and new tensions have emerged in Europe, including in the Balkans and the Caucasus. At the same time, the world is experiencing the most severe economic uncertainties since the 1997-1998 financial crisis, together with new challenges such as climate change and the food and energy security crises. More than ever, the current situation compels nations to promote dialogue and cooperation to surmount common challenges, both man-made and natural.

Viet Nam supports efforts to end violence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

We should also work to facilitate further progress in the search for lasting peaceful solutions to the nuclear issues on the Korean peninsula and Iran on the basis of due respect both for the legitimate rights of States to develop and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and for the regime of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

In follow-up to the Annapolis outcome, I wish to reaffirm Viet Nam's support for the role of the Quartet, the League of Arab States, regional countries and the United Nations, especially the Security Council, in the quest for a lasting solution in the Middle East. Such a solution should respect the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to establish an independent State of their own, and the principle of land for peace.

As leaders of the world gathered here to discuss the development needs of Africa, we were keenly aware of the organic relationship between peace and development. Viet Nam undertakes to work closely with the United Nations and the African Union to find peaceful solutions to the conflicts and disputes that still rage on the continent.

New uncertainties are unfolding in the global economic and financial situation. Climate change and energy and food shortages are becoming more and more serious global issues. In the face of that situation, it is essential to enhance international cooperation to overcome these problems. In that regard, developed

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countries should take measures to maintain their macroeconomic and financial stability and implement international commitments to improve international economic relations and the transfer of technology. Such cooperation is possible and effective only when due regard is given to each country's specific conditions, legitimate concerns and interests.

Given the complex developments in the world, the United Nations has a greater role to play in saving humankind from the scourge of war and in finding solutions to problems. The United Nations must be strengthened to that end. Democratic and comprehensive reform of the United Nations — including the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and the specialized agencies — will make the Organization more effective and efficient in the areas of work mandated by the Charter. Viet Nam will continue to contribute to efforts aimed at making the United Nations more democratic, more effective and more responsive to the needs of the peoples of the world.

In Viet Nam, the Government is working with United Nations agencies and other development partners to implement the One UN initiative. We hope and believe that the experiences of Viet Nam and the United Nations in implementing that pilot reform programme will be useful to other aid recipient countries and to the United Nations reform process overall.

In line with its foreign policy of independence, sovereignty, peace, cooperation and development and its efforts to deeply engage with the world, Viet Nam has seriously observed its commitments and actively participated in addressing global issues. We strongly support the Bali Road Map, which aims to establish the legal framework for international cooperation in addressing climate change beyond 2012. Despite natural disasters and epidemics, Viet Nam is honouring its commitments to maintain the volume of its rice exports at 4 million tons annually. We intend to continue those efforts to ease the pressures caused by the rising price of food and to preserve food security.

The year 2008 marks the first time that Viet Nam has assumed responsibilities as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. In its desire to make greater contributions to the maintenance of international peace and security, Viet Nam has participated in the work of the Council as a constructive and responsible member. We shall continue to uphold the principles enshrined in the Charter while working with other Council members and Members of the United Nations to find solutions that serve the interests of international peace and security and the legitimate interests of all countries and parties concerned.

In the 63 years since its establishment, the United Nations has traversed numerous upheavals of history and acquired an increasingly significant role in international relations. Against that backdrop, and with trust in the power of peoples' will and determination to strive for peace, cooperation and development, we are strongly confident that the international community will overcome new challenges and that the United Nations will continue to live up to the expectations of all the peoples of the world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Puka Temu, Deputy Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea.

Mr. Temu (Papua New Guinea): On behalf of my people and the Government of Papua New Guinea, I bring the General Assembly warm greetings and pledge our support to you, Mr. President, as you guide us in our work. We also wish to thank Mr. Kerim, your predecessor, for his strong advocacy during his tenure as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session, especially in the area of climate change. We also support Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the United Nations in general, especially its agencies, in the work they do to enhance our development aspirations in Papua New Guinea. As we have always done, my Government continues to support the United Nations.

The United Nations currently provides the world forum for Member States to address the many global issues we face together. United Nations reforms need to be carried out in all the relevant areas of the system. We need to address the international gender architecture to make it more robust, responsive and effective. It has to be part of the core reform process to cater for women, youth and children. We must also be vigilant against terrorism and threats to international peace and security. The One UN system needs to be translated more meaningfully in order to effectively enhance each Member State's development priorities.

We support the call for the reform of the Security Council in both the permanent and non-permanent

categories of membership. A number of emerging developing countries need to be accorded permanent status on the Council to better reflect today's circumstances. We therefore welcome the recent consensus to initiate the intergovernmental negotiating process to properly address the long-standing but critical issue of United Nations reform.

We live in a world that provides us many opportunities, as well as formidable development challenges. The challenges include addressing the destructive effects of the illicit use of small arms and light weapons and the need to address globalization and food and energy security, which lead into the wider issue of human security.

Additionally, the adverse impacts of climate change and global warming continue to threaten the existence of many small island States, especially due to rising sea levels. For many small island States, sea level rise and the adverse impacts of climate change are security issues threatening their very survival. We therefore call upon the international community to act urgently in order to ensure the security and welfare of small island developing States.

As a thriving democracy in the Pacific, Papua New Guinea desires to see our friends and neighbours in the Pacific and beyond enjoy freedom and prosperity. In that regard, and consistent with the decision of the leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum, Papua New Guinea strongly encourages Fiji to restore parliamentary democracy by preparing for elections and holding them in 2009. However, Fiji must be supported throughout, and not isolated in its efforts to address its specific national circumstances.

On other regional issues, Papua New Guinea commends the work done so far on the Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration, which we believe may catalyse our region's development. It is Papua New Guinea's strong view that Member States from the Pacific region should be categorized separately by the United Nations in terms of aggregated data and in the area of social and economic classification. While Papua New Guinea is ready, we can support Vanuatu's call for an extension to the May 2009 deadline for submissions on an extended continental shelf.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide us with one of the greatest opportunities to leverage our development process. For that reason, we commend the Secretary-General for convening the high-level meeting on the MDGs during the present session of the General Assembly. However, for the MDGs to be effectively implemented, they must be addressed consistent with national circumstances and with host-country leadership. Further, for the MDGs to be effective over the long term, developing countries must take ownership of the Goals.

At the midway point of MDG implementation, for Papua New Guinea, we believe there is cause for cautious optimism. Papua New Guinea celebrated 33 years of unbroken constitutional democracy on 16 September this year. Due to the political stability achieved by my Government, we can now afford to plan long-term for our own development. We have had steady economic growth in the last five years, due to prudent economic management that has resulted in five successive budget surpluses.

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals remains an integral development priority for my Government. We have set ourselves 15 national targets and 67 indicators, which have been integrated into our medium-term development strategy and sectoral plans.

For example, Papua New Guinea recognizes that education is a prerequisite for the betterment of our people's lives. That is entrenched in our constitution and prioritized under a 10-year national education plan. The current one-laptop-per-child pilot project will make learning accessible, enjoyable and fruitful for our children, while bridging the digital divide. We are looking to expand the project nationwide during the Africa Caribbean Pacific-European Union Joint Parliamentary Assembly, to be held in Papua New Guinea in November. In partnership with UNICEF, we have also introduced proactive programmes aimed at accelerating the girl-child's access to education.

In the area of health, there remain major challenges, such as maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS, which the Government is now addressing through the 10-year national health plan. We have also recorded some positive results in other major health indicators, including a decrease in malaria incidence and in malaria-related deaths, and the stabilization and decline of infant and child mortality.

Ultimately, reducing poverty, expanding access to education and health and empowering women through economic and social participation are what we in my Government are addressing.

Millennium Development Goal 8 makes reference to partnerships. We strongly believe that Goal is critical to the achievement of the other seven. We believe, however, that all partnerships must be underpinned by mutual respect among the partners. For that reason, let me highlight some key partnerships. Our partnerships with Australia, New Zealand, the European Union, Japan, China, Italy, Austria and many non-governmental organizations continue to contribute strongly to Papua New Guinea's development. We also partner with the Coral Triangle Initiative on coral reefs, fisheries and food security, and the Forest-11 Group, launched last year by His Excellency the President of Indonesia. Another important partnership is with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, facilitated by the Clinton Foundation, in the area of HIV/AIDS and the provision of antiretrovirals.

To succeed, we must significantly scale up our partnerships. Often, we all tend to wallow in the negative — environmental degradation, catastrophic climate change, crippling poverty, ineffective governance — rather than leveraging the positive. My Government's vision is to transform those societal challenges into a framework for environmentally and socially sustainable economic growth. It is time to cast off policy chains of the past and create a new paradigm for the future.

Let me be specific. First, we cannot account for the environment as an externality. Our natural environment and its services are not free to society. Once we lose those services, often irreversibly, the costs can be significant.

Secondly, we must create a broad framework for ecosystem service markets. Carbon sequestration must only be the first step, followed by valuations for biodiversity, water purification, rainfall generation, crop pollination and food security.

Thirdly, we must now view our natural environment as an engine for wealth creation. Those valuable ecosystem services must be transformed into lasting wealth that supports the rural communities that have traditionally cared for those assets.

Let me use the issue of reducing deforestation and forest degradation — an issue that our Prime Minister, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, has championed internationally — as an example. Deforestation is a complex subject, but, put simply, it is driven by the fact that the world values forests more dead than alive. Traditional economic theory, which considers ecosystem services a common good and thus free to all, is primarily responsible for the massive loss of the world's forests.

With those ecosystem services valued at zero, rural communities that depend on and care for forests must make a living in other ways. Keeping the land forested means sacrificing the opportunities to be gained by converting it to other uses, such as producing commodities such as timber, palm oil, coffee and cocoa. The international commodity markets, in fact, have hardly changed from colonial times.

In many ways, those two economic relics are increasingly perverse and nonsensical. The environment is devastated, rural communities stay poor and the rich shift the blame. They cite lack of governance and corruption, but those are not drivers of deforestation, but symptoms of obsolete market constructs.

Therefore, global leaders must redraft economic theory and reinvent global markets for a sustainable future. For example, the latest estimate is that approximately $20 billion a year will be needed to halve carbon emissions resulting from deforestation. However, that would be a wise investment, even for that one ecosystem service alone. Forests sequester some 3.3 billion tons of carbon dioxide annually. So, with today's price of more than $30 per ton of carbon dioxide, rural communities are effectively subsidizing the carbon emissions of the rich to the tune of approximately $100 billion per year — more than total annual official development assistance.

Norway has provided great leadership towards that necessary paradigm shift. First, Norway has stood up against global climate change and has targeted the achievement of carbon neutrality by 2030. Norway has also dedicated $2.8 billion to offset emissions reductions resulting from deforestation in developing countries, through the valuation of forest ecosystem services.

Faced by the ravages of climate change on a small island developing State, our Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, has charted out his own bold goals: reducing Papua New Guinea's emissions by 50 per cent before 2025 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2050. Sharing a similar vision, the partnership of leadership between Papua New Guinea and Norway may significantly address several of the greatest

challenges of our time: effectively valuing global environmental services, contributing to the mitigation of climate change, conserving global biodiversity and financing the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in rural areas.

Finally, our global economy values companies in the billions simply for advertising trinkets on the Internet. Some countries make billions by selling fossil fuels that pollute our atmosphere, others by producing low-cost consumer products that humanity does not require. In fact, Google is worth $150 billion, while the world's last great tropical forests left standing are worth nothing. How can that be right?

Together, we must reconstruct our value frameworks. New environmental markets must support tropical countries striving to achieve sustainable development, by generating billions from rainforest ecosystem services that humanity has so far been exploiting for free.

Several communities in my country have voted to cancel their logging concessions, telling me that the forests and rivers have provided all they needed for thousands of years. In some ways, however, they now feel trapped. The old ways allowed them to survive but did not prepare their children for an increasingly complex future. They now struggle with schools that cannot afford the best teachers and with health centres that provide only basic medicines. Yet those communities still remember how to live sustainably — a skill that many others have forgotten in the rush to get ahead.

But there is hope. Bold leadership is required on both sides of the economic divide to transform the way in which we value our environment and create wealth for rural populations. As leaders, we must understand that, while we may have inherited the Earth from our forefathers, we have in fact borrowed it from our grandchildren and our future generations. Indeed, by learning to save our environment, perhaps we can once again learn how to save ourselves and guarantee a better world for our future generations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. José Antonio García Belaunde, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Peru.

Mr. García Belaunde (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to begin by greeting you, Sir, congratulating you on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. We are certain that your experience will enable us to have fruitful and constructive exchanges on the urgent challenges currently facing humanity. Thus, we reaffirm our commitment to contributing to the achievement of positive results during this session.

Fighting poverty and creating opportunities to promote social inclusion are priorities of the Government of President Alan García Pérez, and we are therefore pleased that the General Assembly has rightly chosen the theme of poverty — a challenge requiring a global and comprehensive response — as the central focus of discussion for the present session.

Peru has been affected by the negative repercussions of the increase in food and fuel prices, which are felt most intensely by the poorest individuals. In my country, we are working responsibly to find appropriate responses that can sustainably meet the challenge of enhancing food security. At the same time, we are adopting urgent measures to assist those most affected by rising food prices. The direct relationship between poverty and rising food prices should lead us to develop new and more ambitious formulas for international cooperation that are commensurate with the magnitude of the problem and take into account all aspects of poverty in a comprehensive manner.

Against that backdrop, I wish to highlight a new threat to the possibilities of development: a grave international financial crisis whose scale is still unknown. At its roots lies an unfortunate and irresponsible combination of regulatory loopholes, real estate inflation, reckless mortgages and financial leverages without a sound basis in the real economy. This could lead the world into a crisis of confidence and undermine the considerable progress that developing regions have made in their fight against poverty. Given those phenomena, we await decisive responses and actions by the developed countries to support the financial system and avert the great risks of this crisis.

In the case of Peru, I can say that this turbulence will not cause us to abandon our ongoing policies of investing, creating productive jobs, increasing tax revenues and promoting growth. Peru has been very successfully implementing a programme of comprehensive, inclusive and decentralized development based on two pillars: an economic policy

with the clear objectives of growth and job creation, taking advantage of the country's multifaceted potential; and a social policy that honours the commitment to reduce poverty, increase social inclusion and promote equality of opportunity.

That approach has brought into our economy not only financial resources, but also advanced technologies and management capacities that improve and stimulate the competitiveness of our production, thus increasing and diversifying exportation. As a result of that approach, the creation of direct and indirect employment has increased in an unprecedented way in many areas of the country and thousands of small and medium entrepreneurs have been incorporated into the market in an economy that boosts initiative and creative capacity.

Based on those premises, Peru has made steady progress in recent years, with the growth rate reaching 9.1 per cent in 2007 and forecast to reach over 9 per cent this year. There is, further, a major increase in the domestic component, which is a driving force in the economy.

But to those positive macroeconomic figures we should add the important results in the management of the major components of the social model, such as the expanding social, education and health services as well as basic assistance to the poorest. Through the social policy, the Peruvian Government has achieved, in only two years, a remarkable reduction of more than 5 per cent in poverty and almost 3 per cent in extreme poverty. Infant mortality has also fallen by 51.6 per cent and illiteracy levels have also been reduced by 5.7 per cent. We have also established an objective of reducing chronic child malnutrition by 5 per cent by 2011. We are seeking to enhance the management and increase the impact of the social expenditures of the State.

Those achievements ensure that in the case of Peru the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be met prior to the 2015 deadline in areas such as poverty reduction, nutrition, literacy, health and education, among others. We also see that the role of international cooperation was fundamental in our being able to bring to remote areas social, education and production projects that, in a sustainable manner, raise the standard of living of members of rural communities. The combination of the national effort for inclusion and international cooperation should be maintained in order to achieve, as soon as possible, the full involvement of the Peruvian social fabric in national development.

In recognition of all of those advances, of the economic stability of the country and of the prevailing legal security, three important international risk indicators have given Peru its investment grade. Consistent with this positive evolution of the economic perception of my country, foreign investment increased by more than 23 per cent in 2007 and is expected to further increase this year.

Our growth is also based on expanding the markets, which we have done through regional and bilateral free trade agreements entered into with the United States, Chile, Thailand, Canada and Singapore. We hope to conclude further agreements soon with South Korea and China. We are conducting trade negotiations with the European Union and the Andean countries, a process that we hope will be satisfactorily concluded in 2009. Furthermore, we are ready to engage in negotiations with as many countries as possible, to enable us to boost trade.

There is a broad consensus regarding the shared responsibility of countries of origin and receiving countries in dealing with the phenomenon of migration. Its causes have a global dimension, and so should its treatment. It is a tool of development, both in originating and receiving countries and in the migrant communities themselves. We should look at the central role of migration in terms of creating opportunities for generating wealth and progress, for diversity and for building more tolerant multicultural spaces.

The responsible and constructive handling of international migration should begin with the practical use of international instruments for the protection of migrants. Therefore, the United Nations, together with States, must redouble its efforts to implement measures that will make it possible to ensure respect for the human rights of migrants, migrant workers and their families.

For this reason, in Peru we have been promoting and continue to promote the handling of this matter both in the United Nations and in other forums with a view to establishing mechanisms for exchange of information and specialized knowledge, undertaking standing consultations and forging closer cooperation between the Global Forum for Migration and Development and the United Nations. We must make

civil society aware of the benefits and contributions of migration and continue with dialogue and coordination in multilateral forums, without stopping the progress towards agreements.

The concern about poverty and economic growth requires an examination of the sustainability of development ideas and the most relevant environmental priorities. We need to deal with security and the rational use of water for agriculture and for personal use, deforestation control, soil degradation and environmental pollution, among others. We are working on these issues with the most advanced regulations, a product of our own experience. We have to approach these matters organically. In the case of Peru, we established the Ministry for the Environment a few months ago. We insist that national development programmes take account of the quality of life and the sustainability of land-use models and of natural resources.

Global warming requires us to work intensively with the entire international community to reduce emissions, which are the fundamental reason for the rise in global temperatures and their already visible consequences. Peru is witnessing a rapid retreat of its tropical glaciers, which is threatening the water-supply regime in the most populated and heavily agricultural areas. We want to confirm our conviction on the pressing importance of advancing from the platform adopted in Bali last year with a view to consolidating in Copenhagen in 2009 a comprehensive agreement for the reduction of polluting emissions, in order to avoid the worst natural-catastrophe scenarios for a not-so-distant future.

The current international scene presents a very complicated structure, characterized by contradictory trends of globalization and fragmentation. Indeed, on the one hand, we have global integration of production processes, trade, financial flows and technological revolution, as well as the dissemination of values such as democracy and human rights. But, simultaneously, there is fragmentation because of increasing social inequality, poverty, exclusion, proliferation of civil wars, genocide, terrorism, transnational crime, degradation of the environment and the flouting of international law as a means for the peaceful settlement disputes.

Those contradictory trends between globalization and fragmentation jeopardize the governance of States, the governance of the international system and collective security itself. Peru, true to its traditional constructive approach, considers that the international order should be based on peace, cooperation, multilateralism and, of course, international law. Thus we are of the view that at the present time we need to reaffirm support for the primordial role played by the United Nations in dealing with the major subjects on the international agenda, specifically those connected with international peace and security, the observance of democratic order, sustainable development, the promotion and protection of human rights, and environmental protection.

That approach guided Peruvian participation on the Security Council and has led it to reaffirm its commitment to active participation in peacekeeping operations in the context of respect for the principles of the sovereignty of States and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries. Currently, my country's armed forces are in Haiti, the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. Peru has a contingent in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti and is coordinator of the Group of Friends of Haiti, which is responsible for helping the Security Council in monitoring this case.

Moreover, Peru is an active participant in numerous multilateral mechanisms. This year, we were honoured to host the fifth Summit between the European Union and Latin American and Caribbean heads of State and Government. Next November, we will once again be honoured when we host leaders from the economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum at their sixteenth summit.

As part of our involvement on the international stage, I should also like to point to our contribution to the establishment of the Latin American-Pacific Arc, which aims at harnessing synergies among participating countries in economic and commercial fields, especially as regards promoting investments in the areas of infrastructure and facilitating business, and in promoting cooperation to improve the competitiveness of our economies. All of that is geared towards ensuring a more pronounced and effective presence for our region in the Asia-Pacific region.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Peru's commitment to continue to support initiatives aimed at promoting an environment conducive to economic and social development, the full validity of democracy, the

strengthening of the rule of law and the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the world. That should take place against an international backdrop where conflicts are brought under control, security prevails and there is unequivocal adherence to the norms of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Those are the central priority goals of our foreign policy and constitute the guidelines that will continue to orient Peru's participation on the international stage, and especially in this body.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The sixty-third session of the General Assembly is taking place against the backdrop of various international and regional events and developments that are closely linked to the peace and security of all humankind. Among those are the global food crisis, the increase in energy prices, global warming and climate change and their negative and catastrophic repercussions for the entire world, the global economic downturn that is bordering on being a worldwide recession, the sharp global increase in poverty, our diminishing collective ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the rising rate of infection with HIV, malaria and other deadly diseases, and the fight against terrorism. Egypt believes that all those challenges, as well as others, are high priorities on the international agenda. Their diagnosis and treatment require a concerted international effort. We must all be fully aware that jointly overcoming those problems depends upon our collective diagnosis and our united stand in addressing them.

We need a new approach, vision and methodology to deal with global problems. Unfortunately, the existing frameworks have proven incapable of dealing successfully and effectively with the challenges under consideration. As an example, Egypt believes that the global food and energy crises require serious dialogue between importers and exporters of energy and food. President Mubarak called for such a dialogue at the recent African Union Summit and at the Rome meeting of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The channels currently available for addressing and resolving the problems of food and energy are at odds with each another, to say nothing of the fact that none of them can provide for a genuine and meaningful dialogue between importers and exporters. It was for that reason that President Mubarak was keenly interested in participating effectively in the emergency summit convened by FAO, to which I have referred, on the question of the rising price and availability of foodstuffs.

Along the same lines, President Mubarak has strongly supported the African endeavour to adopt a clear strategy to tackle that phenomenon. In turn, that led to the adoption of the Sharm el-Sheikh declaration at the last African Union Summit, which contains Africa's comprehensive vision for addressing the matter. Egypt has also supported the strategy put forward by the Secretary-General to deal with the issue. We have also called for utilizing that strategy as the basis for more effective international action.

In an effort to translate the growing international concern into an integrated plan of action to address that phenomenon, Chile, Indonesia and Egypt have proposed that that question and its repercussions should be a main theme at this session of the General Assembly. In that connection, I would like to thank the President for his positive response to our initiative and also for including the issue of strengthening international democratic action at the United Nations.

By the same token, urgently establishing collective international political will is necessary to deal with climate change. As one of the countries vulnerable to the repercussions of that phenomenon, Egypt is acutely aware of its gravity. While reiterating our full support for the Bali Plan of Action and Road Map, we call for focused international attention on the issue of categorizing low-lying coastlines, which applies to Egypt. A list of the States most vulnerable to climate change is needed so the United Nations and the international community can provide them with the necessary support as a matter of priority, including technological and financial support.

Based on our belief in globally addressing those urgent economic challenges, Egypt and Norway are facilitating the current negotiations at the United Nations on the final document of the Review Conference on the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development. The goal is to amend the international development agenda for the upcoming stage, while taking into consideration the

agreements reached in all the international meetings and conferences held thus far.

Egypt believes that using language that implies double standards is an affront to human rights. Despite the fact that everyone is adamant in declaring that human rights constitute an indivisible whole, the reality, which we need to change, is that economic, social and cultural rights are not, unfortunately, accorded the same attention as civil and political rights. That adversely affects public perception in many of our societies, in particular those that face dire, and occasionally destructive, economic and living conditions. For such people, talking incessantly about human rights is a luxury they cannot afford, and results in the neglect of their basic requirements for sustenance. The promotion of economic and social rights must therefore be viewed as crucial to strengthening the human rights regime, which is essential to promoting the awareness and practice of the components of that regime.

In that regard, I wish to discuss the important question of using the concept of freedom of expression to incite hatred based on religion. With the utmost respect for the value and importance of freedom of expression, I emphasize that we reject repeated affronts to religions and holy symbols being portrayed as a legitimate exercise of freedom of expression: there are many glaring slogans in whose name crimes have been committed against thousands and millions of people by offending them and their religious beliefs. Egypt calls upon everybody to consider this matter judiciously and objectively with a view to striking the proper balance that protects freedom of expression while respecting the rights and sentiments of all. Egypt will continue to seek such a balance, with the aim of reaching a consensus on the content of draft United Nations resolutions on this matter.

Here, I wish to convey to the Assembly that we are concerned by the unconstructive cultural friction that the world is witnessing, which causes severe divergence in opinion and action; this in turn inflames public emotions and increases the nature and severity of the polarization and confrontation between the followers of different cultures and creeds. This matter must not be ignored.

The international community's approach to disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation is marred by defects, double standards and regression. This is a matter of concern for us. Egypt has always shown great interest in these matters, as best embodied in Egypt's call to rid the Middle East of all weapons of mass destruction. Our interest in this matter is based on our unwavering belief that security and military balance, especially in conflict areas, contributes to laying solid foundations for peace between countries and peoples.

However, achieving genuine peace and security in any region requires, among other things, the establishment of just and parallel international and regional mechanisms in the areas of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. It is notable that, unfortunately, prominent members of the international community are unduly lax regarding Israel's nuclear capability and the extent to which this constantly threatens the security of the Middle East. This occurs as attempts are being made to enhance the obligations included in international mechanisms without paying attention to the issue of achieving the universality of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and subjecting all nuclear facilities in the Middle East to the comprehensive safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Egypt will nonetheless persist in its endeavours, through existing mechanisms and forums and in coordination with friendly States that understand the reality and danger of the situation, in order to change it and to warn of the danger that failing to achieve universality for the NPT in the Middle East would entail.

In my statement today, I have given precedence to international over regional issues. This in no way diminishes the significance of crises, problems and difficulties at the regional level. Rather, it reaffirms the importance that Egypt attaches to the international situation and international problems in general.

At the regional level, as members know, Egypt is persistently involved in painstaking efforts to keep open a window of hope that would allow the Palestinians to achieve their legitimate ambition to gain an independent State on the Palestinian territories occupied on 5 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The current situation, thanks to the efforts of the United States, might suggest to some that there is hope for a real settlement between the Israelis and Palestinians before the end of the year. However, through diligent monitoring of the situation, we

understand that achieving a just and lasting settlement of the conflict — one that provides an opportunity to end Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories and to bring about a Palestinian State — requires serious political will on the part of Israel. This must include the dismantlement of settlements in tandem with withdrawal from the land, and the restoration of Palestinian rights.

However, I must admit that we are sceptical about the strength of the will and conviction of Israeli decision makers. Hence the procrastination and setbacks, as well as the hesitation in settling issues. This is what leads to the widely condemned and politically loaded settlement activities, which clearly indicate the regression and weakness of the Israeli side's will for peace. This is also the reason for the prolongation of the conflict, with its consequences that the whole world knows only too well. But we in Egypt will not lose hope; we will continue to work with everyone in order to achieve the objectives of justice, stability and security for the whole region.

The situation in the Sudan also remains disconcerting in the light of ongoing developments. We have observed numerous foreign hands interfering with Sudan's security and stability, as if their objective were to drive that country towards partition. In this context, I would like to affirm that Egypt is working sincerely with all loyal Sudanese parties, at the forefront of them the Sudanese Government, in order to settle existing problems. Allow me to note, in particular, the situation in Darfur, which remains difficult, and the significant Egyptian participation in the United Nations peacekeeping force there, as well as our participation in all dialogue forums that aim to settle the crisis. I should also note our call for an international meeting to address the crisis and to agree on a road map to end it. Stability in the Sudan requires outside parties to refrain from interfering in Sudanese affairs, just as it requires support for the development process in that country. Egypt will continue its diligent efforts to achieve the interests of our brothers in the Sudan as well as the country's and the region's unity and stability.

In our region, the concept of regional security should be construed broadly, and the security of the Arab Gulf — which is currently in the international spotlight — is one of Egypt's principal concerns, not only because of Egypt's close relations with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), but also because of what Egypt represents in terms of strategic depth for its Arab brothers and sisters of the Gulf. Therefore, we follow closely all developments in the region, in particular the recurrent discourse about "new arrangements" there. We affirm that Egypt is working in coordination with members of the GCC with a view to protecting Arab national security and ensuring that any such arrangements — if they come into existence — will represent true security guarantees for all parties.

A great deal of work lies ahead of us at this session. This requires open minds and outstretched hands in order to meet the demands and aspirations of our peoples for freedom, justice, dignity, security and peace. Egypt will work throughout this session to advance the components of our vision for the international and regional situation, which I have just elucidated.

All of us bear the responsibility for this, just as we shall all bear the consequences and the results. We pledge to work with dedication and sincerity for a successful session under your able presidency, Sir.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Moctar Ouane, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Mali.

Mr. Ouane (Mali) (*spoke in French*): It is my great pleasure, Sir, to convey to you the heartfelt congratulations of the delegation of Mali upon your election to the presidency of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, and to assure you of our full support. I should like also to hail Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his devotion and commitment to our Organization.

The sixty-third session of the General Assembly is opening with the timely theme of the impact of the global food crisis on poverty and hunger throughout the world. Indeed, it takes place in a difficult international context, one marked by the conjunction of food and energy crises. This situation is of concern to my delegation, as it is a potential source of generalized social and political instability.

What can we do? In Mali, we have granted the highest priority to the fight against poverty and the high cost of living. In this respect, the Government has undertaken a series of measures to stem the effects of the present crisis through, inter alia, a temporary suspension of import duties and taxes on basic foodstuffs, such as rice, wheat flour, oil and milk, as

well as subsidizing gas, hydrocarbons and agricultural inputs.

My country, Mali, is firmly determined to achieve food self-sufficiency and to become, in the medium term, an agricultural Power. To that end, we have made agriculture the principal tool to attain accelerated growth. Accordingly, an agricultural framework law has been adopted, and its progressive implementation has included the following measures.

First and foremost, the new law contains a measure to launch the rice initiative, which was designed as a proactive and structural response to the dizzying increase in price of grain products on global markets. Next, the law includes the setting up of a national agricultural development fund and a fund for emergencies and disasters. It also involves the setting up of land commissions and a programme to develop low-lying lands within the framework of local irrigation works. Finally, it involves the setting up of a high council for agriculture. In addition, we will soon adopt guidelines for the marketing of grain products, including rice, and a mechanism for supplying agricultural inputs.

Along these same lines, the Government of Mali has prepared and implemented a national strategy to fight poverty, a strategic framework for fighting poverty and a strategic framework for growth and poverty reduction for the period 2007-2011.

In addition, our Social and Economic Development Project has been conceived by the President of the Republic, Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré. It should enable Mali to increase its production and fairly share the fruits of growth, invest in the future and build a State of good governance and the rule of law.

The fight against corruption is another aspect of this overall project. The national convention that will be organized to address this issue in October 2008 should enable the Malian nation to seek through broad consultation a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in order to define a plan of action against the scourge.

Mr. Salgueiro (Portugal), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Seeking to promote transparent and effective management of its public finances, Mali, which has joined the African Union's African Peer Review Mechanism, has submitted its governance to that evaluation process. This exercise, which will be concluded in January 2009, will take stock of the situation, including in the field of political governance, business governance and governance of socio-economic development. It will result in recommendations for improvements in those areas.

In the same vein, the human rights situation in Mali has been considered within the framework of the new universal periodic review mechanism set up within the context of the Human Rights Council. From this rostrum, laden as it is with symbolism, I would like to reiterate the commitment of the Government of Mali to take concrete action on the relevant recommendations that we are committed to following at the outcome of this process.

Mali remains convinced that the prevention and peaceful settlement of conflicts is the best possible guarantee of international peace and security. Backed by that belief, my country firmly made the choice of dialogue aimed at finding a lasting solution to the situation of insecurity that has prevailed in the north-east of our country. In this respect, the Algiers peace agreement of 4 July 2006 remains relevant, as it preserves our territorial integrity and our national unity, by enabling the various strands of the Malian nation to fully participate in the national construction endeavour.

Aware that security in the Sahelo-Saharan region is closely linked to that of States and peoples sharing the space and that conflicts affecting one country can rapidly spread throughout the region, the Government of Mali, in October 2008, will organize in Bamako a conference on peace, security and development in the Sahelo-Saharan region.

The conference will provide a useful opportunity for the States of the region to jointly reaffirm our commitment to turn our shared space into a zone of peace and security, a centre of stability, growth and development. It will also provide us with responses adapted to the problems and challenges we face: insecurity, transborder banditry, terrorism and trafficking of all types, including trafficking in drugs, arms and human beings.

Here, Mali considers that it is the duty of the international community to take vigorous action to maintain and build international peace and security. In this respect, we welcome and encourage progress

achieved in the resolution of conflicts and crises that rack the African continent, including those in Côte d'Ivoire, the Sudan, Somalia and the Great Lakes region.

Mali calls for the resumption of the negotiating process in the Middle East and reaffirms its unswerving support for the creation of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State.

There are many other serious challenges facing the international community to which we will have to respond appropriately to build a better world together. First and foremost, there is the problem of climate change. Today more than ever before, the very survival of our planet is threatened by climate change, which has a serious impact on living conditions in developing countries such as mine through, inter alia, desertification, the silting up of rivers, the deterioration of the environment, a reduction of the length of the winter periods, floods and poor rainfall patterns. We should, therefore, urgently undertake measures which are commensurate with the pressing nature of the problem. In this respect, the conclusions of the high-level event on climate change in 2007 and those of the Bali Climate Change Conference in the same year are still relevant and are worthy of being implemented in a diligent way. Mali, which is a party to the Kyoto Protocol, is eager to make a useful contribution to the fifteenth United Nations Climate Change Conference, to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009.

The second major challenge to which we must devote particular attention is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which poses one of the most serious threats to sustainable development. We must redouble our efforts and our resolve to implement the 2001 Declaration of Commitment, as well as the outcomes of the high-level meetings on AIDS and the seventeenth International AIDS Conference, held in Mexico last August. All of these forums have highlighted the severity of the situation and stressed the urgent need to act and to mobilize resources to fight the pandemic.

The third significant challenge for the international community is the situation of landlocked developing countries, which, as a result of their isolation and their great distance from the world's main markets, are confronted with serious handicaps. I congratulate the Secretary-General for having taken the initiative to convene, following the general debate, a high-level plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. Mali will actively participate in that meeting and will work to ensure that leads to operational conclusions that can contribute to the comprehensive, rapid, and effective implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

The fourth challenge is institutional reform of the United Nations. This issue remains important as the continuation of the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council and of the strengthening the Economic and Social Council. Thus, the expansion of the Security Council is clearly a pressing necessity, particularly to redress the historic injustice committed against Africa, namely, that it does not have a permanent seat. That is something which is underscored in the joint African position on the issue.

All these challenges which we currently face require a collective global response. Only a reformed and democratized United Nations may serve as a genuine crucible for universal collective conscience capable of best discharging its primary mission, namely, to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and destruction. Mali will do its full part in this fight.

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. Elmar Maharram oglu Mammadyarov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Mammadyarov (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I have the honour of congratulating His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua on his election to the post of President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I wish him every success in his endeavours. I would like also to pay tribute to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for his active collaboration with delegations throughout the last session. I wish also to express my profound respect for the able leadership demonstrated by His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in the management of the United Nations.

The effectiveness of the international security system has an impact on the authority of the United Nations. When agreement among Security Council members on approaches to overcoming challenges to world peace seems elusive, the common security and credibility of the United Nations are seriously affected.

We shall respect our shared values and accept the restraints inherent in those values in order to find an approach that is based on a global consensus. The

Security Council must fully realize its primary responsibility for the collective management of threats that transcend national boundaries and have implications for international security. All of us must strictly follow the Charter as a unique instrument of international relations.

The reform of the United Nations and its Security Council will further improve the credibility of the United Nations system. The success of the reforms will depend on our political willingness to deliver the expected results. We need to harmonize diverging views in order to arrive at a generally acceptable solution that will reflect the universal character of the United Nations and adapt it to present-day realities.

We must enhance the role of the General Assembly as the supreme policymaking organ of the United Nations. It is only by strengthening the Assembly's mandate that we can successfully tackle some of the most pressing issues facing humanity.

This session is taking place at a very critical juncture for the South Caucasus region and for the international community as a whole. The worrisome events that took place last month in Georgia have clearly shown that restoring stability to the region requires a collective effort to strengthen the international security system.

Obviously, the situation in that region is a matter of concern for us, and Azerbaijan is already making its contribution to reduce tensions. We firmly believe that issues that cause disagreements in the region must be settled peacefully, through dialogue, on the basis of the norms and principles of international law and mutual respect.

The Georgian case has also proved that the protracted conflicts existing in the area of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (GUAM), including the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, remain a major source of instability, and a fragile ceasefire regime cannot be a substitute for lasting peace in the region. Persistence of these conflicts endangers international peace and security and prevents the full utilization of the potential of this strategically important region, situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. A resolution of the protracted conflicts in the GUAM area will not only bring immediate benefits to affected countries, but will substantially contribute to stability and regional security.

In that context, the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform initiated by Turkey could serve as a good departure point for building the regional security system. It is of utmost importance to ensure that our common efforts are built on the principles of mutual respect for territorial integrity, recognition of existing borders, equality and good-neighbourliness.

The prerequisite for the establishment of cooperation and good-neighbourly relations in the region is the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied lands and the restoration of the full sovereignty of Azerbaijan over those territories. Only through that can we pave the way for peace and economic prosperity for the entire region.

The earliest possible resolution of the armed conflict in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan remains a primary task for us. The Government of Azerbaijan is committed to a peaceful settlement of the conflict on the basis of the norms and principles of international law, including relevant Security Council resolutions, General Assembly resolutions and documents of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

In order to facilitate the negotiation process, Azerbaijan initiated, during the sixty-second session of the General Assembly, consideration of the agenda item entitled, "The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan". The Assembly comprehensively addressed the issue and adopted resolution 62/243. We highly appreciate the principled support of the States members of the General Assembly for that resolution, which reaffirmed the Assembly's continued respect and support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders and demanded the withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The resolution also reaffirmed "that no State shall recognize as lawful the situation resulting from the occupation of the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, nor render aid or assistance in maintaining this situation" (*resolution 62/243, para. 5*). It recognized

> "the inalienable right of the population expelled from the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan to return to their homes, and stresse[d] the necessity of creating appropriate conditions for this return, including the

comprehensive rehabilitation of the conflict-affected territories". (*para. 3*)

The Assembly

"[recognized] the necessity of providing normal, secure and equal conditions of life for Armenian and Azerbaijani communities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, which will allow an effective democratic system of self-governance to be built up in this region within the Republic of Azerbaijan". (*para. 4*)

I would like to stress that the principles laid out in the resolution will be used as a basis in the negotiation process. The General Assembly will continue to follow the situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan under agenda item 18 of the current session.

In recent years, Azerbaijan has made crucial contributions to strengthening regional stability by promoting security, energy, communications and economic cooperation projects. Production and secure delivery of hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian Sea to international markets has been an important element of Azerbaijan's foreign and domestic policy. We will continue to carry out a strategy that will substantially improve energy security and economic prospects in the region and beyond.

Another strategic project under implementation is the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway linking our country with Georgia and Turkey through a major transport connection. This will create an essentially new and effective communication corridor between East and West, between Europe and Asia.

The economic development and growth of Azerbaijan have been on the rise. The growth rate of our gross domestic product remains one of the highest in the world, and reached 18 per cent in the first nine months of 2008. According to the forecasts of international financial institutions, the growth rate will retain its dynamics for the next year.

Azerbaijan is of the view that facilitating trade offers enormous opportunities to pursue development objectives. Against this background, the joint report of the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation, "Doing Business 2009", recognized my country as a top reformer in 2007-2008 in implementing business regulatory reforms, and as one of the leading countries with investment-friendly economies. According to the report, out of 181 countries, Azerbaijan was rated first in improving the commercial environment and encouraging business start-ups. Azerbaijan strongly believes that these factors are central in attracting and mobilizing financial resources to support socio-economic development of the country.

In the meantime, we are champions in the implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and consider the General Assembly's adoption without a vote of resolution 62/274, on the EITI, as a sign of the global recognition of our efforts.

Protection and promotion of human rights is one of the central duties of the international community. Today, this is not merely a question of protecting individuals; it is fundamental to promoting peace and stability around the globe. Azerbaijan remains actively involved in the work of the United Nations human rights bodies. As a member of the Human Rights Council, we attach great importance to the efficient functioning of the Council. It is our common task and responsibility to ensure that that institution lives up to the expectations vested in it and truly becomes an objective, vigorous and credible universal human rights body.

Azerbaijan is fully committed to all its obligations as a State member of various international organizations to promote democracy, the rule of law and human rights. We believe that through consistent reforms and investments in education, we will achieve long-term stability and prosperity in our part of the world.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Karel de Gucht, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Belgium.

Mr. de Gucht (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium echoes the congratulations that have been extended to Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session, and wishes him every success.

During the past year, the international community has faced unprecedented challenges. As we gather here in New York, a major crisis of confidence is shaking the financial markets. This has an impact, of course, on the world economy. The spectre of a global recession has been added to the already onerous challenges that have arisen in recent times, such as the food crisis, the

spike in energy prices, global warming, terrorism and the danger of nuclear proliferation.

In addition, our world is changing and becoming increasingly multipolar. In that regard, 8 August 2008 will remain symbolic: the very day on which China offered us the unique spectacle of the opening of the Olympic Games, Russia and Georgia were colliding in a conflict with harmful repercussions for peace on the European continent. The very foundations of the balance that had existed since the 1990s seemed to be called into question. This uncertain situation has far-reaching consequences for international organizations.

We could imagine that, in the face of these enormous challenges, all the world's countries would come together to combat them jointly. Unfortunately, that is hardly what is happening. Belgium believes that only through close cooperation and enhanced multilateralism will we be able to respond to these challenges. More than ever, whether we like it or not, we are in a situation of mutual dependence. Crises affect all of us, and the actions taken by some have an impact on everybody else. That is particularly true for the current serious financial crisis. If we can stabilize the financial markets in the coming few days through proactive measures, that will benefit not only the major banks and their employees, but also the entrepreneurs, consumers and citizens of the whole world, including those in the least developed countries. Those countries have already been heavily affected by the sharp increase in the prices of agricultural and energy products and are the least equipped to deal with a tightening of credit conditions.

Stabilizing the markets is certainly necessary, but it must not make us lose sight of the lessons to be learned from the crisis and the corresponding medium- and long-term measures to be taken to ensure that the world does not again become victim to financial management that at times is risky and immense speculation with borrowed money.

We are well aware that the crisis goes far beyond the capacity of a single country, however powerful it may be. Better regulation of financial markets and the drawing up of control regulations are essential, in particular with regard to short selling, hedge funds and structured products. That is a task that can be undertaken only at the international level, in close cooperation among the world's economies.

Understand what I am saying: Belgium is convinced of the advantages of globalization and free trade. We must not forget that thanks to that globalization of trade, in recent decades the world has seen remarkable development and that hundreds of millions of men and women have escaped extreme poverty and today have a better daily life, even if the sharing of wealth still remains too unequal.

The developed countries have the duty to spearhead a better organization of the financial world. The European Union has already taken steps in that direction, and we welcome that. However, there remains much to do. Here, I make an appeal that we embark on that task together, with energy and dedication.

The emergence of new economies is an asset for the world. Ever more countries are determined to become players in the international system. They must take their due place, as the French President emphasized last Monday on behalf of the European Union (see A/63/PV.5). It is also in everyone's interest to demonstrate responsibility.

I would like to stress today that the emerging economic Powers, from Brazil to India and from China to South Africa, have, more than we do and more than ever, a need for trade that is both open and fair to continue to develop their economies at the pace they deserve, without however causing imbalance in the pillars of international trade. Here too, we must again find the constructive political will necessary to restart the Doha trade negotiations that unfortunately failed in Geneva last July.

We all must also show ourselves to be responsible players, in order to try and find solutions to the challenges posed by the food crisis and the huge increase in energy prices and to combat the causes and effects of climate change. Those challenges we face, issues that are extremely complex and closely interlinked, are different facets of one and the same question, a question that is at the heart of the concerns of my country: that of sustainable development. None of us can resolve these problems alone. They call for solutions at the world level. It is thus crucial that we successfully conclude in December 2009 the negotiations for a global agreement on climate, as we pledged in Bali.

Nor is it by closing in upon ourselves that we shall reduce the huge inequalities that still characterize

global development. Better distribution of the fruits of economic growth is a world responsibility that concerns us all. The Millennium Development Goals must remain our main guiding principle. The Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, which will take place in Doha at the end of this year, will be an important moment. The developed countries must do more, and I reiterate Belgium's determination to achieve the objective of devoting 0.7 per cent of its gross domestic product to official development assistance by 2010.

However, this is a shared responsibility, which first and foremost falls to the Governments of the countries involved. That is why Belgium will continue to work actively in promoting the concept of good governance.

In that regard, the issue of natural resources is particularly important to me. It is not a matter of calling into question the sovereignty of any country. But sovereignty also carries with it responsibilities — indeed, responsibilities first and foremost. Natural resources may be a driving force of development to draw populations out of poverty if their exploitation is undertaken in a transparent way to benefit the economy of the country. Unfortunately, experience shows that frequently that is not the case and that illegal exploitation often fuels conflict. Therefore, we must work towards achieving greater transparency and fighting illegal exploitation. That is why Belgium organized last year a debate on that subject in the Security Council (see S/PV.5705), and why it would like extensive debate on natural resources during the current session of the General Assembly.

As a member of the Security Council, Belgium has had the opportunity to be at the heart of the international system. That has bolstered our conviction that we can meet those great challenges only through increased international cooperation and has further strengthened our determination to work for effective multilateralism. The key to that effectiveness is not to be sought only in structures and mechanisms. It lies also and above all in our political will to make them work and together to find solutions to our common problems.

Here, I note with regret a certain turning inwards, even a return to sovereignty-based concerns. I want to be clear: I have great respect for the sovereignty of States. That goes without saying. That is one of the fundamental principles upon which our international system is founded. However, being a sovereign State also means that a State must shoulder its responsibilities in the international community, even more so with regard to its own population. Being a sovereign State does not mean that it can neglect the needs of its citizens in terms of development, security, the rule of law and human rights. Sovereignty does not give carte blanche for conduct that is incompatible with the values and commitments to which we have subscribed within the United Nations. Sovereignty must be a force for good, and not an excuse for a State not to meet its responsibilities and to avoid its international and humanitarian obligations. Otherwise, it becomes what I would call souverainism: an abuse of sovereignty behind which to hide and escape its duties.

Too often the argument of respect for sovereignty prevents the international community from acting when the situation in a country is deteriorating before our eyes, resulting in the population suffering and an increase in serious human rights violations. The examples are well known and strike us all. Myanmar, Darfur, Zimbabwe and the eastern Congo all confront us with a responsibility to protect, a responsibility that the international community is called upon to exercise when a sovereign State cannot or, worse, refuses to assume that responsibility. That can be undertaken through humanitarian instruments, the civil administration of crises, peacekeeping or peace-restoration missions, or, earlier on, crisis prevention.

In that context, I wish to speak of combating impunity. Belgium is convinced that there cannot be lasting peace without justice. That principle guides our foreign policy. It is achieved in the first place by bolstering the rule of law and justice at the national level before, during and after a conflict. For the gravest crimes, we actively support the development of international criminal law. This is not the time to let any doubts persist with regard to our active support for the International Criminal Court by putting forward, as some do, other, more regional solutions. That is particularly true now when the Court is preparing its first trial.

Peace and security are the responsibility of the international community as a whole, and it is in that spirit that Belgium approached its mandate in the Security Council, nearly two years ago: seek constantly, in a constructive and non-dogmatic manner,

the best way to move things forward. It is particularly pleased with the progress in crisis management and the extraordinary expansion of peacekeeping operations. From that perspective Belgium calls for a renewal of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with a strengthened mandate, which is a key factor in maintaining in the eastern Congo the prospects for settling the crisis and avoiding a Somalian scenario.

Belgium also welcomes efforts of regional organizations and their collaboration with the United Nations. I am thinking, for instance, of the European Union alongside the United Nations in Chad and the Central African Republic.

We need to make further progress with regard to an integrated and comprehensive approach to conflict resolution. The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission is a real step forward in that area. That is why Belgium has assumed the chair of the country-specific configuration on the Central African Republic. Major progress has been made, but much remains to be done, in particular in order to better help countries during that delicate phase when they are emerging from crisis.

We will soon celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That will be the time for us to remember the values that it represents and that we all share, and to which we all subscribed and which we should implement for the benefit of our citizens and for greater well-being throughout the world. It is a responsibility that we must remember, particularly since it seems to be called into question at a time when we are faced with the major challenges that I have just described. Together and on the basis of our shared values, we should assume those responsibilities.

That is the real challenge. It is not through less, but more international cooperation and multilateralism that we will achieve solutions.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Walid Al-Moualem, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al-Moualem (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to congratulate the President and his friendly country, Nicaragua, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I wish him every success in his mission and express our satisfaction with the message of his introductory remarks at the opening of the general debate. I would also like to thank his predecessor, Srgjan Kerim, for successfully steering the work of the previous session. I extend to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon our best wishes for success in the realization of the purposes and principles of the Charter of our international Organization.

The Middle East region is one of the most volatile regions of the world, and it continues to face mounting challenges. Daunting as those challenges may be, they must not deter us from moving forward towards the light at the end of the tunnel and from seeking better conditions. Syria is an essential part of the solutions sought by the peoples of the region, by virtue of its geographic location and the aspirations of its people.

For that reason, President Bashar Al-Assad took the initiative to convene the Damascus Quartet Summit, attended by President Sarkozy of France, the Emir of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, and the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey. All of those States have a stake in the security and stability of the Middle East region. Each and every one has made constructive contributions, despite differing perspectives and positions. The four leaders probed the issue of peace and stability in the Middle East and stressed the need for consultations and coordination and joint pursuit of those objectives. They recognized that inaction, the suffering resulting from the Israeli occupation of Arab territories that has continued since 1967 and disregard for the Palestinian people's rights have driven the people of the region into a state of despair. Under those circumstances, attaining a just and comprehensive peace becomes untenable and the region becomes a fertile ground for anger and turmoil. In the final analysis, that situation does not serve the best interests of the world or of the countries of the region.

By convening the Quartet Summit, Syria stressed that a just and comprehensive peace is its strategic choice and that it is striving to attain it in cooperation with regional and international partners who share its vision. The realization of peace requires all of those who have a direct stake in the matter, or those who have the power or who can influence the outcome, to evince the necessary political will.

Years after the will to build peace lost its priority status in the policies that influence the situation in the region, we were asked to go to Annapolis. We all went to Annapolis, despite the ambiguity of the undertaking. We wonder what Annapolis achieved. Where exactly do we stand? Have the Annapolis promises to establish a Palestinian State before the end of the current year been fulfilled? Has Israel stopped building settlements in the occupied Arab territories?

Despite all that, given that the withdrawal of Israel from our occupied Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 and making peace are Syrian national priorities, and notwithstanding the circumstances to which I just referred, we entered into indirect negotiations with Israel, with commendable mediation by Turkey.

As President Al-Assad said, we wanted the negotiations to establish the grounds and pave the way for direct negotiations that would ultimately be sponsored by many international parties. Peacebuilding requires, however, genuine Israeli will that is capable of accommodating the exigencies of peacemaking. It also requires the American will to include peace in the Middle East on its list of priorities after years of deliberately ignoring and dodging the question, which has exacerbated the situation in the region.

Syria stresses once again its firm and consistent support for the Palestinian people's rights to recover their occupied land and establish their independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. Syria underlines the need to restore Palestinian national unity through national dialogue and is working towards that end in its capacity as the current Chair of the Arab Summit.

The Iraqi situation is a matter of prime concern to Syria because Iraq is an Arab fraternal country and because, as a neighbouring country, we are affected by the negative and positive developments there. We have always stressed the need to preserve the unity of the people of Iraq, its territorial integrity, non-interference in its internal affairs and the need to preserve its sovereignty, independence, its Arab and Islamic identity, and to oppose the calls to divide it. We have repeatedly declared that the solution in Iraq begins with national reconciliation built on the principle of respect for the will of all Iraqis. We have reiterated the need for foreign troops to withdraw from Iraq in line with agreements reached with the Iraqi Government. We have always condemned all terrorist acts committed in Iraq, resulting in the deaths of many innocent civilians. We believe that the stability that Iraq longs for requires an Iraqi consensus to overcome the obstacles barring its realization.

It is regrettable that the abnormal circumstances that prevailed in Iraq as a result of the United States invasion in 2003 have prompted a great number of Iraqis to leave their country in pursuit of safety and security. Syria hosts many Iraqi brothers and sisters. Therefore, we are deeply aware of the humanitarian crisis that has forced Iraqis from their country and exacerbated the situation in their country. We hope that an improved security situation will permit all Iraqis to return to Iraq.

We in Syria are pleased that the situation in Lebanon is being resolved after the conclusion of the Doha Agreement, which enabled the Lebanese to elect a consensual President, establish a Government of national unity and initiate a national dialogue. Despite unfounded claims to the contrary, we have consistently supported all measures that could assist the Lebanese in arriving at consensual solutions built on dialogue and the affirmation of national unity. During the recent visit of the Lebanese President Michel Sleiman to Syria, we declared that we had jointly decided to establish diplomatic relations between our two countries with a view to maintaining and supporting mutual, deep and wide-ranging relations and interests between our two fraternal peoples. We also agreed to resume the work of the joint Lebanese-Syrian border demarcation commission in accordance with mechanisms and priorities to be agreed upon by the two parties. The two countries also agreed to entrust to their respective authorities the task of continuing to work together to control their common borders, fight smuggling, undertake the necessary measures to promote trade, create the conditions for economic integration and establish a common economic market.

Syria supports efforts aimed at guaranteeing the Sudan's unity and territorial integrity and promoting peace and stability in that country. In that context, we are completely opposed to the decision of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and call on the Security Council to suspend it with a view to creating favourable conditions for pursuing the initiative endorsed by the Council of Ministers of the League of Arab States on 9 August 2008. The initiative called for establishing an Arab ministerial committee under the chairmanship of Qatar and entrusting it with overseeing comprehensive peace talks between the

Government of the Sudan and the armed groups in Darfur. The committee would sponsor those negotiations in cooperation and coordination with the international mediator of the African Union and a United Nations representative. It would also seek to improve the humanitarian situation and to promote development in Darfur.

Syria, a member of the committee, calls on all States concerned and on the international community to support the committee in its efforts to fulfil its mandate. In that regard, Syria welcomes the normalization of relations between the Sudan and Chad as a positive contribution to the solution of the Darfur question.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) guarantees the right of all States to possess nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes. Much has been said about the Iranian nuclear issue, with some advocating a diplomatic solution while others promote the use of force. Meanwhile, Iran has time and again stressed that it is solely dedicated to the peaceful uses of nuclear power. Deep mistrust between Iran and its interlocutors complicates matters and prevents the stakeholders from reaching an understanding. We seek a political understanding of the Iranian nuclear issue. Any other option is not in the interests of any of the stakeholders and will only inflict catastrophic losses on the region and the world.

In that context, and in line with our principled position, we call for declaring the Middle East a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction. Similarly, we recall the draft resolution that Syria submitted to the Security Council on 29 October 2003. At the same time, we stress the need to compel Israel to dismantle the hundreds of nuclear warheads in its possession, to submit its nuclear facilities to the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency and to accede to the NPT.

The crisis that erupted in the Caucasus region was an extremely ominous event. It is impossible to ignore its dimensions and repercussions on international relations. By now, we know who sowed its seeds and are aware of the provocative acts associated with it, prompting Russia to exercise the option it chose. We appreciate Russia's positive response to the efforts of France in its capacity as President of the European Union to arrive at a settlement of the crisis that will guarantee regional stability and spare the world a revival of the international relations that prevailed in the past.

Much has been said about the war on terror. Years after waging that war, some issues still prompt us to ask: Is terrorism less widespread today than it was before? Can we claim to have prevailed over that extremely dangerous phenomenon? Accusing countries of sponsoring terrorism for ulterior political motives is a desperate attempt by those promoting those claims to justify the failure of their approach.

The right approach requires us to address the root causes of terrorism. How can we overcome terrorism if we continue to conflate terrorism with the right of the individual to live on his land, free from occupation or threat of war and aggression? We call upon all States to cooperate in the fight against terrorism. We particularly stress the need to avoid confusing terrorism with fundamental rights, because doing so gives terrorism an opportunity to strike.

Experience demonstrates that unilaterally dictating the world's political agenda is wrong. The wars and the financial and food crises raging throughout the world today require us to work together to address that malfunction by seeking to engage all regional and international stakeholders through active diplomacy and dialogue as the means to settle controversial questions.

Closing the door to dialogue and imposing isolation, unilateral sanctions and diktats have never been successful tools in the exercise of sound international relations. Contrary to claims made from this very rostrum a couple of days ago, all attempts at isolation are doomed to failure. Respect for the principle of democracy in international relations that takes into account the vision and interests of all States, large and small, will contribute to the realization of security and stability in the world and help it solve the problems it faces.

The Charter of our international Organization, in which States of different perspectives and interests enjoy equal membership, has set forth formulas that remain valid and could be used to build a world in which justice reigns supreme, based on mutual understanding — a world free from the threat of terror and in which there is no place for inciting hatred among cultures and religions. Promoting those values, principles and objectives and using them as guidelines for our work will serve the interests of peace and

stability in the world and contribute to the good of humanity at large.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad AlBusaidi, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman.

Mr. AlBusaidi (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to convey the regards of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said of Oman, and his best wishes and appreciation for the efforts to make this session a success.

I am quite hopeful that this session will yield a great deal of understanding on various issues of common interest that shall enhance global security and stability in accordance with the aspirations of the people of the world to achieve prosperity and realize the Millennium Development Goals.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to express my appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his commendable efforts to improve the performance of this Organization in the interests of the international community.

In that connection, we would like to emphasize the role of international institutions and the need to support their efforts by intensifying cooperation and coordination with them in order to uphold justice and righteousness and to entrench security, peace and stability throughout the world.

Annual sessions of the General Assembly are important events through which Member States have the opportunity to express their concerns and views. There is no doubt that the efforts to preserve the environment have remained a top international priority, particularly in view of developments in recent years, during which the effects of climate change have been felt across the world.

The international community has made numerous efforts in that respect, the most salient of which includes Agenda 21, adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil, and the Bali Road Map adopted at the 2007 Conference to the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Indonesia. Those efforts are designed to deepen understanding and awareness of climate change and to improve weather forecasting in order to save lives and property, to discourage human practices that are detrimental to the environment and to educate people to live in harmony with it.

More than ever before, however, we are called upon to intensify and double our efforts and joint cooperation in order to deal with such circumstances in a constructive and practical way. We must support purposeful scientific research aimed at finding creative means, policies and plans to guarantee a stable and sustainable environment while taking into account physical evidence related to climatic cycles and environmental change through the ages. We hope that the fourteenth climate change Conference, to be held in Copenhagen next year, will produce practical and useful recommendations that meet our hopes and aspirations.

Economic development and trade among nations have helped build bridges of communication based on mutual benefits and common interests. The current trade system, however, is in dire need of a vision and systems that keep pace with economic transformations and with emerging economic entities in order to maintain the balance of the global economy and to cater to the needs of developing countries.

Large industrial countries need to lift trade restrictions on the exports of developing countries and to share with them modern technologies, effective marketing mechanisms, and educational and scientific frameworks that guarantee meaningful human development everywhere. The World Trade Organization (WTO) should play a more effective role towards the removal of trade restrictions and the application of appropriate policies so as to create a freer trade environment.

While we welcome the invitation by the Director-General of the WTO, Mr. Pascal Lamy, to hold another round of trade negotiations in the context of the Doha Development Agenda, we would like to emphasize that such negotiations should rely on WTO rules that are rooted in equity and justice.

Everyone knows that the Palestinians are suffering the repercussions of tragic human circumstances that have deprived them of their right to a life of dignity. The harsh Israeli policies of closures, the erection of checkpoints and the perpetuation of settlement activities make the daily lives of Palestinians very difficult. Those practices also undermine efforts and initiatives to achieve peace and stability. Indeed, they call into question the credibility

of Israel's desire to seek a real solution to end the conflict.

We urge the international community to step up its efforts to make Israel shoulder its responsibilities, in view of the importance and inevitability of peace as the only option for joint and harmonious coexistence between all peoples of the region. It has become clear that there can be no peace without the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, foremost of which is their right to live safely on their land and in their independent State, side by side with Israel and within internationally recognized boundaries.

Our commitment to peace is strategic and fundamental. Ensuring peace is a collective responsibility of the international community that should be forcefully and selflessly shouldered, regardless of the difficulties encountered. On that basis, the Sultanate of Oman, in the context of its friendly relations and cooperation with many countries, is ever eager to promote long-term relations as a fundamental pillar of joint efforts in support of peace, security, dialogue, mutual understanding and harmony.

The progress made towards Lebanese reconciliation is an achievement that invites optimism. While we praise the efforts made by the State of Qatar and all other Arab States, as well as by the League of Arab States, we call upon all Lebanese parties to implement the Doha Agreement in order to safeguard the higher interests of the brotherly Lebanese people. We also welcome the visit to Syria by Lebanese President Michel Sleiman and its positive outcome, including the agreement to establish diplomatic ties between the two countries.

With regard to the situation in Iraq, we note with satisfaction the relative improvements in the country's security conditions. We hope that the situation will continue to improve until stability prevails throughout Iraq. We also hope for continued efforts by the Iraqi Government and all political forces to reach a comprehensive national understanding that can unite all sectors of Iraqi society and restore harmony and concord to its national and social fabric.

As for the situation in the Sudanese region of Darfur, we welcome the steps being taken by the Sudanese Government, in cooperation with the African Union and the League of Arab States, to establish peace and stability in the region. We therefore call upon the international community to support those efforts in order to help build a national consensus among all brotherly Sudanese citizens.

From this rostrum, we reiterate our call to all Somali parties to cease fighting and to refrain from any actions that could hamper sound diplomatic efforts. We also hope that all parties will abide by the agreement reached in Djibouti on 9 June 2008.

In addition, we call for continued consultations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and other States on the Iranian nuclear issue. We hope that those efforts will result in an agreement that upholds Iran's right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, while eliminating the concerns of a number of States regarding the Iranian nuclear programme.

The Games of the XXIX Olympiad, hosted by the friendly People's Republic of China in Beijing, were unique in terms of their organization, which definitely made that international sports event a great success. The Games have enriched human civilization in all of its beautiful cultural diversity. We wish to take this opportunity to express our best wishes for the next Olympic Games, which will be hosted by the United Kingdom in London in 2012, as well as our hope that they will continue to contribute to human and cultural coexistence among all nations.

The progress that has already been made in the field of collaborative international endeavours encourages us to make further collective efforts to address the challenges facing us and to protect the peoples of the world from their political, economic and social repercussions. We also wish to emphasize the importance of a joint commitment to the establishment of justice and the rule of law. Governments must shoulder their responsibilities in a spirit of positive cooperation, understanding and mutual respect, which are basic principles of international peace and security.

In closing, I wish the President of the General Assembly the best of luck in leading the present session to a successful conclusion. I should like to reaffirm the support of the Sultanate of Oman for efforts to ensure the welfare of all nations and future generations. We hope that all of this will be achieved in an atmosphere of cooperation, harmony and love.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Marat Tazhin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Tazhin (Kazakhstan): First of all, I would like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly on his election to his high office and to express my confidence that, under his able stewardship, the sixty-third session of the General Assembly will be fruitful and successful.

When Christopher Columbus reached the shores of America in 1492, he believed that he had discovered a new route to India. Today we know that, many years before Columbus made that voyage, European explorers had reached Saint Lawrence Bay. Obviously, prior to the so-called discovery of America, developed civilizations had already existed there. At the same time, Columbus did discover America in a certain sense, because it radically altered the understanding of world geography.

It is globalization that is giving us a new vision of the world in the twenty-first century. While offering new opportunities to the world economy and human development, globalization is also triggering a new surge of political and economic competition worldwide.

We can now see clearly that it is imperative to prevent the interests of peoples and countries from being sacrificed for the sake of that competition. Given recent complications and disputes, it is urgent that we preserve the basic principles of international law, including that of territorial integrity. It is crucial that we avoid double standards in the application of that principle.

Despite the efforts being undertaken, the world is not becoming a safer place. We must admit that there is still no international consensus regarding the issues of disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. As everyone knows, history could repeat itself if we do not learn its lessons properly. Therefore, nuclear disarmament and an enhanced non-proliferation regime should become a priority for all, without any conditionalities.

Kazakhstan, a country that voluntarily relinquished the fourth-largest nuclear arsenal in the world, believes that it is absolutely imperative to develop new mechanisms for adapting the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to new realities. We call on Member States to finalize the necessary procedures for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the strengthening of its verification mechanism. That is precisely the purpose of the integrated on-site inspection field exercise currently being conducted in our country at the former Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground.

The crisis of the non-proliferation regime poses the real threat that nuclear weapons will fall into the hands of terrorists. Kazakhstan is actively participating in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and in that regard hosted this year the Atom anti-terror exercises and an international conference on the physical protection of nuclear material.

The situation in Afghanistan remains a matter of grave concern. In our opinion, the way to normalize the situation is to build up the international community's efforts for the peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan. To that end, the Government of my county has adopted a special plan on assistance to Afghanistan.

Kazakhstan is committed to timely and effective achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We have already reached a number of targets in several areas, including poverty reduction, access to education and the empowerment of women. Now we are embarking on the MDG-Plus targets, adapted to our national conditions, in order to set up higher benchmarks and indicators.

Like many other countries, Kazakhstan is deeply concerned about the situation regarding the global food market. We share the view of the majority that an integrated approach is required to overcome the current food crisis.

Today the international community faces the challenge of a global rise in basic food prices. Kazakhstan, as a major producer and exporter of grain crops and flour, is prepared to make a substantial contribution to overcoming the food crisis. As of 1 September 2008, we have lifted our ban on grain exports. That is our contribution to the international community's collective efforts to curb global grain prices.

Because of the critical importance of energy resources, preserving the global energy balance has become a more urgent imperative. Kazakhstan fully understands its ever-increasing role and responsibility as a reliable energy supplier.

Bearing in mind that energy and environmental problems are closely interconnected, I would like to once again draw attention to the initiatives set forth by

the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, from this rostrum a year ago (see A/62/PV.4). They call for adoption of a Eurasian pact on the stability of energy supplies, as well as development of a global energy and environment strategy within the United Nations framework.

Kazakhstan attaches critical importance to problems associated with climate change and sustainable development. To ensure the convergence of the European and Asian processes of transition to sustainable development and their merging into a single Eurasian process, Kazakhstan has put forward an initiative on convening in 2010 a conference of ministers of environment, economy and social welfare of the Asian and Pacific countries and a pan-European conference on the environment for Europe in 2011.

We would like to express our profound appreciation to the entire international community, the United Nations and its agencies and programmes for the support they rendered to our country in mitigating the consequences of environmental disasters in the Aral Sea and Semipalatinsk regions. Calling for continued active international cooperation, we request support for the draft resolutions to be submitted at the sixty-third session of the General Assembly concerning the problems of the Semipalatinsk region and granting the International Fund to Save the Aral Sea observer status at the General Assembly.

The growing number of natural and man-made disasters makes it necessary to intensify international cooperation as the most effective means of responding to emergencies. Kazakhstan supports cooperation in setting up national and regional platforms, exemplified by the Central Asian Disaster Response Coordination Centre.

We strongly believe that the special needs of landlocked countries should be fully taken into account in accordance with decisions and recommendations based on the Almaty Programme of Action. We hope that the forthcoming midterm review of the Programme will result in the adoption of specific decisions on assistance to this group of countries.

Escalation of ethno-territorial conflicts and increased interfaith tensions indicate that we have reached a critical turning point in our common history. Under these circumstances, Kazakhstan has been consistently and proactively pursuing a policy aimed at ensuring inter-ethnic and interfaith accord, as well as preserving political and social stability in our society. Upon the initiative of our head of State, President Nazarbayev, the Kazakh capital, Astana, hosted two Congresses of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, in 2003 and 2006. With its next summit meeting to be convened in 2009, this forum has already proved to be an effective international mechanism for promoting peace and tolerance on a global scale.

Kazakhstan is actively involved in the work of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations. Our initiative to declare 2010 the International Year of the Rapprochement of Cultures has been supported by all Member States, as reflected in resolution 62/90. We appeal to all countries and organizations of the United Nations to prepare relevant plans for the attainment of the goals of the International Year, in accordance with the provisions of that resolution.

Taking further practical steps to promote dialogue among civilizations, Kazakhstan has proposed the convening of a ministerial conference to be entitled "Common world: Progress through diversity". Foreign ministers from different regions of the planet have been invited to attend the first meeting of that forum, which is to be held in Astana in October.

As Kazakhstan prepares to assume the duties of Chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2010 and of the Ministerial Conference of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 2011, we intend to use this unique opportunity to promote the issues of ensuring greater tolerance and furthering measures by member States against all forms of discrimination as serious items in those organizations.

I would like to conclude my remarks with some ancient oriental wisdom: "Between a man that digs a hole and the man that fills it, there should always be a third man ready to plant a tree". In today's world, the United Nations performs that vital function by fostering dialogue and cooperation among all peoples and all States.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mourad Medelci, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria.

Mr. Medelci (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I also pay well-deserved tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Srgjan

Kerim, and thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the dignified, far-sighted and able manner in which he has carried out his heavy responsibilities since his election.

The central theme of this session and the subjects chosen for two high-level events are a perfect reflection of the international community's current concerns. In recent months, the world has experienced crises that have revealed our collective vulnerability and our inability to confront those crises. As always, since the world order is based on that imbalance, the developing countries in particular pay the highest price by being powerless to meet the challenges that threaten their political stability and social cohesion.

The President returned to the Chair.

In that regard, the consequences of climate change and the food crisis caused by the scarcity and soaring prices of certain basic commodities have plunged millions of people into extreme poverty. International financial and economic institutions, whose mission it is to anticipate crises and alert the international community to their potential risk, must play their proper role by undertaking the needed reforms without requiring developing countries, in particular African countries, to abide by commitments incompatible with their development goals.

We must effectively and resolutely combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We stress once again the importance and urgency of adopting a comprehensive counter-terrorism convention, while avoiding any provisions or stipulations that would prejudice the legitimate struggle of people to reclaim their freedom or of discrediting any particular religious community.

It is indispensable to continue the work of reforming the Organization so that it can become an instrument to promote freedom, democracy, justice, peace, security, development and progress. Such reform will be fruitful and promising only if it includes reform of the Security Council through the equitable expansion of its membership, the democratization of its decision-making processes and the improvement of its working methods.

Algeria's actions in the geographical and political spheres to which it belongs are based on the principles of good-neighbourliness, cooperation and solidarity. In the Arab Maghreb, Algeria is working to ease the difficulties we are experiencing, which have hindered the re-launching of the Arab Maghreb Union, in the conviction that the destiny of our peoples and the requirements of our times demand the advent of a united and prosperous Maghreb. We are, however, keen to ensure that efforts in that regard do not meet with new disappointments, and we therefore think that that re-launching must be undertaken on a sound, solid and lasting basis that takes into account the enlightened self-interest of all the peoples of the region.

Inspired by its faith in that ideal of the Maghreb, Algeria has sincerely supported and will continue to support efforts to find a just, lasting and internationally legitimate solution to the conflict in Western Sahara that will allow the Saharawi people to exercise freely and transparently their inalienable right to self-determination. That is why Algeria believes it vital that the momentum created by the Manhasset process be preserved and encouraged. We cannot overstress the responsibility of all the parties. We have made an urgent appeal to the Secretary-General to participate in actions to remove obstacles to the negotiating process and to bring about conditions that will permit the holding of the fifth round of the process as soon as possible, as required by the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Algeria, for its part, will continue to assume fully the role dictated by its status as a neighbourly country and an observer of the process.

On the Middle East, Algeria is pleased to note the positive developments in Lebanon and encourages all parties to persevere on the path of unity and national reconciliation. It is obvious that the Middle East will know no peace without a settlement of the Palestinian question, which is at the core of the Israeli-Arab conflict. There is no need for me to remind the Assembly that the advent of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East will inevitably require restoring to the Palestinian people their national and historic rights, including their right to an independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, the return of refugees and the restoration of all the other Arab territories occupied by Israel. On that basis, we appeal to the international community to fully shoulder its responsibilities towards the Palestinian people, to support their just cause politically and to step up its humanitarian assistance in order to ease their suffering.

The African continent has been experiencing profound and promising changes. Undeniably, it is in the field of peace that the continent's achievements

have been the most remarkable. Thus, the African Union and other regional organizations have become respected and necessary partners, particularly in preventing and settling African crises. Algeria welcomes these positive trends. We regret, however, that the support and commitment of Africa's partners remain below the agreed objectives, both with respect to restoring peace and to economic and social development programmes.

We believe it is of the greatest importance to refrain from any action likely to thwart current peace efforts or to undermine the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Sudan. We must therefore mobilize the international community to promote the political process, which remains the only way to ensure that the Sudanese people can benefit from the restoration of peace and national reconciliation. In that regard, we reiterate our support for the efforts and proposals of the League of Arab States, the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement, calling on the Security Council to freeze the decision of the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and to promote and consolidate the dynamics of peace and national reconciliation.

Similarly, with regard to the situation in Zimbabwe, Algeria can only welcome the approach adopted by the African Union and the Southern African Development Community to enable the people of Zimbabwe to overcome their current difficulties.

We are solidly behind Africa's efforts to settle the Somali crisis by means of unreserved support for the political process and the dispatch of a peace mission to help the transitional authorities to restore peace and security in the country.

There is no way to overcome the dangers to peace and harmony in the world other than concerted efforts and consultations on the basis of a renewed equitable and effective multilateral system that places the non-discriminatory fulfilment of human needs and the preservation of human dignity at the heart of its concerns. From that standpoint, the fight against all the ills that afflict large swathes of humankind — whether extreme poverty, endemic disease, environmental problems or clandestine immigration — can be won only if we all, and in particular the developed countries, join our efforts. The two high-level meetings during this session, and others to be held over the next few months will undeniably test our capacity to respond collectively and solidly to the challenges of our time.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bahrain.

Shaikh Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): May I, at the outset, convey my heartfelt congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session and assure you of the commitment of the Kingdom of Bahrain and its delegation to working closely with you towards achieving our shared objectives. I have no doubt that your experience and abilities will play a crucial role in ensuring the success of this session. I also want to take this opportunity to thank your predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for his leadership of the General Assembly at its previous session and to express our continued and deep appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his ongoing, unflinching dedication and initiative in addressing the many challenges facing the United Nations and the world.

These General Assembly meetings provide a valuable opportunity for all of us in the international community to reflect on the challenges, problems and issues facing us all in order to form a more comprehensive view of the issues, to understand their causes, be it through success or failure, and to work together to develop a shared vision of the future and the tools necessary to achieve our aims and realize our vision.

Today, the international community faces many challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), notably those related to energy, the environment, natural disasters, food shortages, education and the financial crisis that has recently shaken the world. These challenges make achieving the MDGs difficult for many States, to a degree that affects their economic development and increases the rate of poverty in them. We therefore need an urgent and effective response from the international community to deal with those pressing issues in order to achieve the MDGs. Yet, as we review our progress to date, the global effort to achieve the Goals has been uneven, at best, to the point that we are today on the verge of a development emergency.

The Kingdom of Bahrain welcomes the opportunities provided by the high-level event on the MDGs, held on 25 September, and the high-level meeting on Africa's development needs, held on 22 September, to renew the commitments of all States.

In addressing these important issues, we must not lose sight of the impact of disasters, both natural and man-made, in holding back progress towards achieving the MDGs. It is thus imperative that States integrate disaster risk reduction into their development plans. We simply cannot afford to ignore or delay these development issues. Nor can we dismiss them as soft issues, for if action is not taken soon, they will become real threats to global security and prosperity. The Kingdom of Bahrain therefore fully supports the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction and plans to host the launch of the report in May 2009.

As we all know, the issue of climate change is of utmost importance. As the world prepares to meet to negotiate a successor to the Kyoto Protocol by the end of 2009, global demand for energy is rising fast, as populations increase and some developing countries undergo dramatic economic growth. The International Energy Agency predicts that the world's energy needs could increase by 50 per cent by 2030. We therefore look forward to the meeting to be held in Poland later this year in advance of the United Nations Climate Change Conference to be held in Copenhagen in 2009. We are hopeful that all sides will realize the importance of the climate change issue and will commit themselves to addressing the overriding interests of the future of our planet and of future generations. Our hope is that a comprehensive and effective agreement can be concluded and implemented.

The peaceful use of nuclear energy has become a preferred option for many countries, and here the Kingdom of Bahrain therefore shares the concerns of the international community. Therefore, future agreements on the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes must be made within a strengthened non-proliferation regime, with improved safeguards and an expanded verification mechanism, in order to ensure that our peoples are not put at risk. Indeed, a highlight of the twenty-eighth Supreme Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council, held last December in Doha, was the acknowledgment of the right of countries of the region to seek nuclear expertise and to possess nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, in close cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Given its universal impact and implications, energy and its various sources are in need of a holistic, global approach, yet they are dealt with in a fragmented, piecemeal manner. That unsatisfactory situation leads us to suggest the establishment of a truly comprehensive energy organization. Such an organization would bring a joint international perspective to determining the role and usage of hydrocarbons, nuclear power, new and renewable energy sources, and would introduce innovative solutions to reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Such a body could provide accurate assessments of global energy demand and supply and bring energy data under one roof. It would also provide any objective advice that might be required on an optimal energy mix that is both safe and environmentally sound.

Having spoken of energy and climate change issues, I must now turn to the food security crisis, which is a result of high food prices and which in 2007 increased the number of hungry people in the world by about 50 million. We believe that the solution to that crisis lies in working together to implement solutions, such as reducing biofuel production, changing consumption habits and investing in sustainable agricultural methods.

The shock that has recently affected the international financial system has almost resulted in a global economic catastrophe. That shock has revealed the weaknesses and fragility of the current financial system and its propensity for rapid and widespread dislocation. We bear the historic responsibility to establish transparent new regulations based on the interests of all States Members of the United Nations and to prepare a framework that can contain any future financial crisis.

The fact is that multilateral cooperation is fundamental to addressing these challenges, as no country alone can resolve such issues and crises or isolate itself from their consequences. As the Secretary-General said in his opening statement,

(*spoke in English*)

> "Nations can no longer protect their interests or advance the well-being of their peoples without

the partnership of other nations." (*A/63/PV.5, p. 1*).

(*spoke in Arabic*)

The Kingdom of Bahrain therefore supports efforts to reform, renew and reinvigorate the international Organization and its organs to be more responsive to the needs of a new world. We agree with the view of the Secretary-General, set out in his annual report (A/63/1), that we need a stronger, more effective and more modern Organization. We look forward to the structural reform of this international Organization to enable it respond more effectively to the challenges faced by the international community and to increase its capacity to deal with such issues.

We must make every effort to address such shortcomings as threats to the international security system emanating from a wide range of external sources, including extremists, terrorists, drug traffickers, money launderers and intellectual property pirates. We need to develop collective security arrangements that bring together our security efforts while ensuring respect for existing borders between States and avoiding encroachment on their sovereignty.

On the issue of terrorism, we consider terrorism to have many faces — whether in the form of the heinous crime perpetrated in Islamabad a few days ago that led to the deaths of scores of innocent people, or agitation and incitement from afar or a variety of other manifestations. We should be clear and decisive in confronting terrorism in a comprehensive manner so as to defeat it both in the field and ideologically. We believe that the struggle against terrorism is a battle that we should wage, united, if we are to get rid of its evil.

The Middle East faces many acute issues in desperate need of settlement, the most pressing of which is the need for a just, comprehensive, lasting and peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question based on ensuring security for all the peoples of the Middle East region, including Israel. Such a settlement must take place within the framework of international legitimacy and the relevant terms of reference, where the choice will be just peace, as called for in the Arab Peace Initiative.

In that regard, there is also an urgent need for a peaceful settlement on the Syrian track, including withdrawal from the occupied Arab Syrian Golan and the remaining Lebanese territories. It also requires a halt to Israeli incursions into Lebanon, whose stability must be supported. It is also important to have a resolution of the issue of the occupied islands of the United Arab Emirates, either through direct negotiations or by referring the issue to the International Court of Justice. That would be a significant step towards strengthening trust between the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Iran.

The Gulf region, which is an integral part of the world economy, has experienced destructive wars during the past three decades. It will not be able to endure a new war, due to the severe consequences on the world economy. The Kingdom of Bahrain therefore reiterates its call for a peaceful solution to the Iranian nuclear issue, in order to avoid the scourge of war in the region and to enhance world peace and stability.

Moreover, there is an urgent need to rid the Middle East and the Gulf region of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, while safeguarding the rights of all countries to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in accordance with the comprehensive safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In order for the Middle East to enjoy stable and lasting peace, it is incumbent upon us to re-evaluate our outlook on the region and to consider the possibility of developing new regional frameworks to address and overcome long-standing challenges. Now is the time, for example, to consider the establishment of an organization that would include all States of the Middle East, without exception, to discuss long-standing issues openly and frankly, in the hope of reaching a stable and durable understanding between all parties. As Arabs, we accept peace as a strategic option. We are committed to international legitimacy, ending old conflicts and hostilities and beginning a new chapter for a historic rapprochement between the peoples of the region that will lead towards a better future characterized by understanding, stability and prosperity.

Developments in the Kingdom of Bahrain in recent years have been characterized by dialogue and understanding, a process inaugurated by our leader, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, as part of his extensive reform programme that aims at strengthening democracy, political reform and the promotion and protection of human rights. At a time when we will

soon join the United Nations and the international community in commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which laid down the principles and values of freedom and human justice for modern times. Bahrain's election to the Human Rights Council and the adoption at Geneva in June of the report on our first universal periodic review serve to clearly illustrate the international community's recognition of Bahrain's efforts in the area of human rights.

The Kingdom of Bahrain will continue to move forward in that and other fields, for example, by establishing Bahrain's national human rights institution and continuing to make progress in the political, economic and regulatory spheres. The Kingdom of Bahrain will not hesitate to play its role in helping brotherly and friendly States and in sharing its success stories, which have helped provide a better life for our people. In that regard, His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, in cooperation with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, has sponsored an award called the Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa Habitat Award, which honours distinguished research that contributes to alleviating poverty and safeguarding the environment and recognizes the efforts of States to achieve desired economic development. His Highness is expected to present the award this year during the fourth session of the World Urban Forum, which is to be held in Nanjing, in the People's Republic of China.

A key pillar of Bahrain's approach to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) continues to be its investment in modern education that is practical, relevant and of high quality and that instils critical thinking and creativity and encourages innovation and acceptance of the other. In that respect, I want to note that Bahrain has been able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the area of education significantly before the 2015 deadline. We have done so by providing children with free high-quality education and by making basic education for all a fundamental human right.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the "land of immortality" and proud host of many civilizations, is a country where the concepts of tolerance and coexistence among all segments of society are central. Mosques stand alongside churches and temples of various denominations, and people enjoy freedom and religious tolerance irrespective of their religion or ethnicity. Fraternal values, moderation and the rejection of violence and terrorism are embedded in our culture, auguring a promising new era in the history of humankind.

That is the Kingdom of Bahrain that is committed to participating fully, along with the rest of the international community, in achieving global peace, stability and prosperity and to confronting current and future challenges, for the benefit of our peoples and future generations. That is a task the international community must undertake in a spirit of cooperation and good faith, for when future generations evaluate our actions and hold us to account, they will not forgive our mistakes and miscalculations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Omar A. Touray, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Gambia.

Mr. Touray (Gambia): I bring to everyone here greetings from His Excellency Al Hadji Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, President and head of State of the Republic of the Gambia.

The legitimacy of multilateralism, which lies at the core of the United Nations system, is being increasingly questioned. Yes, with the launching of the former Secretary-General's report "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all" (A/59/2005), a lot of reforms have taken place and are still taking place. However, the question is, "Is it enough?" One of the unassailable conclusions reached in that report is that "no reform of the United Nations would be complete without reform of the Security Council" (*A/59/2005, para. 169*). We have established a new Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission and have undertaken far-reaching management reforms, yet the reform of the Security Council is still being unnecessarily stalled for no justifiable reason. That delay constitutes a source of frustration for the citizens of this world, who are increasingly questioning the legitimacy of our decisions. The world is watching the unsatisfactory status quo with dismay.

In any event, the aspirations of the African people and their Governments to adequate representation on the Council cannot be ignored because they are legitimate and justified. The suggestion that reforming the Council's working methods alone could constitute sufficient reform is not accurate.

My delegation has taken note of the High-level Panel's report and the Secretary-General's comment on United Nations system-wide coherence, as well as the concept paper on institutional options to strengthen United Nations work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. My delegation aligns itself with the position of the Group of 77 and China on that work in progress.

Our world is also going through a period of crises, ranging from the food crisis and the energy crisis to the collapse of financial markets and the collapse of trade talks. There is no country on Earth that is not affected by those crises. Too many repetitive high-level meetings, too many false promises and unfulfilled commitments continue to characterize our efforts to address the global crises. We in the developing world have received too many prescriptions from the international community and we have fastidiously followed them. The irony, however, remains that our partners are not fulfilling their side of the bargain in the way they should. It is our hope that the upcoming Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be held in Doha this November, will result in the reversal of that trend.

We are asked to eliminate subsidies while our partners in the North continue to give huge subsidies to their farmers. We are opening up our markets while they continue to introduce subtle measures including tariff and non-tariff barriers to deny us effective market access. They commit to doubling overseas development assistance, but turn around and withhold the little that trickles in. When it trickles in, it becomes a media event. That is no way to end poverty. That is no way to end the food crisis. That is no way to end the energy crisis. Certainly, that is no way to address climate change, and it is no way to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Allow me to share some thoughts about the global food crisis. When the crisis struck earlier this year, no economy was spared. The food crisis was predictable because the international community over the past decade has neglected agriculture in the developing countries. In most developing countries, agricultural research and training institutions collapsed, largely because of underfunding. Research and development were outsourced to multinational corporations. Most of us in the developing world saw the collapse of our agriculture markets through competition from the heavily subsidized farmers of the developed world. World trade talks keep on failing, to the detriment of poor farmers in rural Africa and elsewhere in the developing world.

Our response to the food crisis followed the usual pattern of convening conferences and meetings and adopting blueprints that merely heal the symptoms. We need more than that. How many times have we met in Rome and elsewhere just to adopt the same commitments that we have already adopted over the years? Our farmers need agricultural inputs, such as machinery and fertilizers, to enhance their production capacity. We all know what is at stake. Let us honour our commitments in order not to repeat the dramatic events that stem from food shortages.

As we address the food crisis, we cannot underestimate the impact of skyrocketing energy costs on the incomes and livelihoods of our populations. Our economies are under enormous stress and our gains in economic growth and development are at risk of being completely eroded. We appreciate the efforts that a number of energy-producing countries are making to ease the impact of the crisis on net importing countries. Our delegation believes, however, that sustained efforts should continue to be made to stabilize the oil market. Beyond tackling the economic crisis that is impacting the world, we should also pay attention to the question of conflict resolution in various conflict areas.

One of the cornerstones of the Gambia's foreign policy is the pursuit of peace and security. As a peace-loving people, it is our constant desire to contribute to the search for lasting peace wherever there is conflict. It is for those reasons that the Gambia actively participates in peace missions and promotes good-neighbourliness, friendship and cooperation throughout Africa and beyond.

I must register my satisfaction at the peace dividend that is being reaped today across Africa thanks to the commitment of African leaders to finding solutions to African conflicts. We are witnessing the resurgence of hope in Sierra Leone and Liberia after many years of consolidation of peace and security. It is my delegation's fervent hope that the international community will not relent in extending to them all the financial, technical and material support they require to turn their societies around for the better.

The Gambian delegation fully shares the agony of the Somali Government and people over the breakdown of law and order and the internal conflict that continues to plague that country. In that regard, I wish to salute the effort that the Government and the people of Ethiopia, the neighbouring countries and the African Union are making in trying to bring peace and security to Somalia.

It is the strong desire of my delegation to see a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Darfur. As a troop-contributing country to the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, we humbly call on all the parties to iron out their differences at the negotiating table. Regarding the threat to indict President Al-Bashir of the Sudan, the Gambia wishes to register its full support for the position taken on the matter by the African Union, the League of Arab States and the Non-Aligned Movement.

The people of the Middle East are tired of living in a theatre of conflict. The Palestinian conflict has lingered for too long and the condition of ordinary Palestinians continues to deteriorate even after numerous accords and promises. General Assembly resolutions, Security Council resolutions and even the recent International Court of Justice advisory opinion on the situation are not being implemented. The Quartet and the international community seem helpless. We must ask ourselves: "How do we respond to the despair and lack of action that seem to characterize the peace agenda of the United Nations in that region? When will the two-State solution be achieved?" Unless we do something to break the logjam in the ongoing negotiations, lasting peace will remain elusive.

Iraq and Afghanistan continue to roil in conflict. The international community must give the Governments of those countries space to make decisions that are in the best interests of their peoples.

Allow me now to address some neglected issues of international justice. My delegation has always addressed the question of Taiwan in this Assembly from the point of view of justice, fairness and equality. Taiwan is a stable and prosperous democracy that is willing and able to take part in the work that the Organization does. How can one justify the exclusion of Taiwan from actively participating in the activities of United Nations agencies? Safeguarding the welfare of the 23 million Taiwanese through their participation should be accepted under the principle of universality. For example, although it has the world's tenth largest shipping capacity, Taiwan does not have access to the International Maritime Organization. That adversely affects the progress of its shipping industry.

Furthermore, as the world's eighth largest economy and twentieth largest foreign investor, Taiwan possesses significant economic strength and continues to share its development experiences with many developing countries through technical and humanitarian assistance. Taiwan is supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals. I therefore strongly believe that we should all agree to let Taiwan participate in the activities of the specialized agencies of the United Nations. That is a modest request that my delegation fervently hopes merits the Assembly's objective consideration.

The perpetuation of the unjust extraterritorial economic embargo against Cuba has never made sense, does not make sense today and has no place in our community of nations. Its sole objective is to inflict unnecessary harm and suffering on a resolute people. The General Assembly's persistent calls for its abolition have only met with indifference. At their hour of need, when hurricanes Ike and Gustav inflicted massive damage on the country, Cuba's humanitarian call for the lifting of the embargo to enable it to purchase necessary humanitarian supplies has met with nothing but a cold response. There is no room for such action in the twenty-first century. The embargo must end.

I would like to address a number of social issues that are very high on the global agenda. In Africa, we are committed to combating the scourges of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other infectious diseases. Over the years, African Governments have committed substantial resources to fighting those diseases. Yet, our health-care delivery systems remain under serious stress because of the flight of trained professionals to more advanced countries. That is considered to be positive migration, but we are being devastated by it. I think some serious dialogue needs to begin between our countries and beneficiary States on how to get fair compensation for such huge losses.

The other side of migration is what some call "illegal" migration, especially from Africa to Europe. It is a question that is tied to the problem of youth

unemployment in our societies and to the broader question of development. Over the years, we have tried to address the migration conundrum at various forums, but we need to come up with solutions that empower young people through job creation, skills and vocational training programmes in order to stem the tide. Governments must manage migration humanely. The human rights and welfare of migrants and their families should be upheld by all societies. My delegation would like to appeal to all Governments to do more to stamp out the increasing rise of intolerance, xenophobia and racism directed against migrants and their families.

Ours is a world of considerable opportunities and challenges. Let us collectively exploit the opportunities offered by our globalized world to tackle the challenges that face humankind. Together, we can do it.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

Sheikh Al Nahyan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I have the pleasure to express to you, Mr. President, and to your friendly country our sincere congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I would also like to thank your predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for successfully guiding the proceedings of the previous session. I should also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his unceasing efforts to strengthen the Organization and re-energize its role in international affairs.

The United Arab Emirates has made major progress in a number of domestic areas. For example, we have increased the representation of women in our executive and legislative bodies, including by expanding their effective participation in the labour market. We are developing national laws on the protection of and respect for human rights and are making significant efforts to improve the welfare of those with special needs. Attempts are also under way to enact legislation to regulate foreign workers in order to ensure their full rights. In keeping with our commitments under relevant bilateral and international agreements, we are also increasing our efforts to combat human trafficking and to provide protection and all the necessary support for its victims.

With regard to the environment, the United Arab Emirates attaches great importance to environmental issues. In cooperation with the Worldwide Fund for Nature, we have launched a number of ambitious strategic programmes, such as the development of Masdar City, which will be the world's first carbon- and waste-free city, completely dependent on renewable and clean technologies such as solar energy, which will be used to generate power and desalinate of water.

Foreign aid has an important place on our national agenda. We have continued to provide various types of financial and humanitarian assistance to many countries to help them to fund their development programmes and infrastructure projects. Directly and through our membership in the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Donor Support Group and our contributions to the specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations, we are also providing assistance to those who have suffered from wars and natural disasters.

In order to alleviate the suffering of millions of people as a result of rising food prices, my country has dispatched 2 million tons of wheat to Yemen, Syria and Egypt. Also as part of our foreign aid, we have provided additional financial assistance to help several developing countries adjust to the phenomenal increase in their energy costs.

In that regard, we would like to express our concern about the repercussions of the financial crisis in international markets. We reiterate that this matter urgently calls for a joint international mechanism that will contribute to the establishment of strong and transparent rules to regulate international financial markets.

The way in which development has taken place in the United Arab Emirates provides a vivid example of tolerance and coexistence. We hope to enrich and strengthen those values through our educational and cultural programmes, for we strongly believe that interaction between different nations and peoples is both of fundamental importance and an essential prerequisite for the achievement of stability, welfare and prosperity in our region.

The United Arab Emirates therefore attaches great importance to radically restructuring and modernizing our educational system to align it with technological and educational innovations so that it meets the needs and requirements of our development programmes. We also believe that providing education for all is one of the major and significant issues facing us. It is essential that we devote all our resources to it, for in education lies the hope that we can break the evil cycle of poverty and ignorance, which in turn lead to the creation of a fertile environment in which terrorism and extremism can take root and grow.

Iran's ongoing occupation since 1971 of the United Arab Emirates'' three islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb is an issue of central importance to us. From this rostrum, I would like to reiterate our firm position demanding the full restoration of our full sovereignty over the three occupied islands and their territorial waters, airspace, continental shelf and exclusive economic zone. The islands are part and parcel of our national sovereignty. We reiterate that all actions and measures, whether military or administrative, undertaken by Iran since its occupation of the three islands are null and void. Iran's actions have no legal effect. We therefore renew our call to the international community to urge Iran to respond positively to the sincere appeals of the United Arab Emirates, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the League of Arab States by agreeing to resolve the issue through committed and serious direct negotiations or by referring the dispute to the International Court of Justice.

We strongly believe in making the Middle East, including the Arabian Gulf, a zone free from weapons of mass destruction. That would require compelling Israel to comply with United Nations resolutions by bringing its nuclear facilities into compliance with the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and unconditionally signing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, as other countries of the region have done. We also urge the Islamic Republic of Iran to continue its cooperation with the IAEA and the international community in order to dispel fears and suspicions related to the nature and objectives of its nuclear programme. We also call on all other stakeholders to commit themselves to continuing to address that issue through political and diplomatic means in order to avoid escalation and achieve a peaceful solution that can ensure stability and security for the region and its peoples.

Based on our firm belief in the right of countries to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in accordance with the safeguards regime of the IAEA, the United Arab Emirates urges developed nations to support the legitimate needs of developing countries for access to nuclear energy by providing them with the best possible access to the equipment, nuclear materials and technological and scientific know-how related to peaceful purposes. The United Arab Emirates believes that its peaceful nuclear programme provides a practical and responsible example of transparency in meeting our energy needs, while at the same time we pledge not to engage in enrichment or reprocessing, with the support of the organizations and institutions of some friendly countries and under the supervision of the IAEA.

On another front, the United Arab Emirates has continuously spared no effort to support and promote every regional and international effort to help the Government of Iraq and its people. It is our hope that the latest initiatives of the United Arab Emirates, including the write-off of more than $7 billion in debt and interest due and the re-opening of our embassy in Baghdad, will contribute to promoting economic development and strengthening the political process. That will require the renunciation of all communal and sectarian violence and full commitment to the unity, sovereignty and stability of Iraq, the preservation of its Arab identity and the rejection of any attempts to divide or fragment the country.

With regard to the Middle East, the United Arab Emirates has strongly supported the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, including final status negotiations and the outcome of the Annapolis Conference. In that context, we would like to express our concerns about the lack of earnest in Israel's attitude towards those negotiations. We call on the international community, and in particular the Security Council and the members of the Quartet, to press Israel to lift the siege it has imposed on the Palestinian people and to implement international resolutions related to freezing all of its illegal settlement activity, dismantling unlawful settlements and ending its occupation of all Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, including the holy city of Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and some Lebanese territories. Ending the occupation would bring Israel into compliance with relevant international

resolutions, the road map and the Arab peace initiative. It would also ensure the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, as well as Israel's security.

My country has cooperated effectively and consistently with every effort to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including money-laundering. We shall continue to do so in order to rid the world of that scourge and its causes. At the same time, we re-emphasize our support for all activities to promote dialogue among civilizations and enhance the spirit of tolerance among all faiths.

In closing, I would like to stress the need for full compliance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law in meeting the daunting challenges ahead. I hope that this session will produce international consensus on how to address those challenges for the benefit of humankind.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Lazăr Comănescu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania.

Mr. Comănescu (Romania) (*spoke in French*): Romania fully associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union by President Nicolas Sarkozy. I should simply like to make a few remarks with regard to issues of particular interest to my Government. I should like to frame my statement around two words: responsibility and solidarity.

The basic purpose of the high-level meeting that took place on 25 September was to review the progress made in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and evaluate the feasibility of achieving them. It was a matter not of whether they were appropriate or reasonable, which they obviously are, but rather of determining the viability of implementing them in the face of new challenges. The conclusion was that international cooperation and determination could provide a solution, provided that responsibilities were met and solidarity forthcoming. In doing so, we would be making the idea of community concrete.

With regard to climate change, the world energy crisis and food security, I should simply like to say that the vulnerability of nature is inevitably linked to our increased technological capacity to influence the climate — sometimes irreversibly — through the cumulative effects of human activity; hence the moral imperative of responsibility to the future. We cannot separately or individually find solutions to the problems that affect us all, in particular global warming and the energy crisis.

In the face of all those interconnected challenges, it is our responsibility to better equip the United Nations with the necessary means to coordinate effective joint efforts. The revitalization of the General Assembly, system-wide coherence, Security Council reform and, not least, the reform of the Department of Political Affairs are all areas in which we have a responsibility to make significant progress. It is encouraging that there has been an effort to find common denominators in many projects and initiatives.

Any reform of the Security Council must take into account the legitimate aspirations of the regional groups, with the ultimate goal of ensuring a more representative, legitimate, transparent and effective Council.

If we expect results from the United Nations, we must provide it with the appropriate resources. Following the reform of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, it is only logical to strengthen the capacity for analysis, political mediation, foresight and preventive diplomacy of the Department of Political Affairs. My country is ready once again support the initiative for institutional consolidation, in particular as regards a European regional office charged with expanding its reach to the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region.

United Nations regional political offices could also increase their cooperation with regional and subregional organizations, whose resources should be in synergy with those of the global Organization. The cooperation between the United Nations, the African Union and other subregional organizations during the recent crises in the Darfur region of the Sudan, in Kenya and in Zimbabwe are all encouraging examples. We also welcome the ongoing cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization of la Francophonie.

I should now like to say a few words on democratization. Romania welcomes the substantial expansion and improvement of cooperation in the Conference of New or Restored Democracies, including the unprecedented efforts of Qatar in that regard.

The current challenges should give rise to renewed international cooperation. The network of democratic solidarity that provides support to countries emerging from conflict or from autocratic regimes is founded on a philosophy of freedom that repudiates threats from international terrorism or radicalism, which have developed their own network as a sort of parallel globalization based on fear. However, the international network of cooperation should not have anxiety and fragility as its common denominators, but instead the natural propensity of States and organizations that share the same values, principles and objectives, namely, freedom and respect for the law and the dignity of the human being. Allow me to recall that, on Romania's initiative, in 2000 the General Assembly adopted its comprehensive resolution 55/96, which set out the defining characteristics of democracy.

(*spoke in English*)

Peacekeeping missions remain the backbone of the international role of the United Nations. Post-conflict normalization and rebuilding should be an integral part of the international strategy to deal with potential breaches of peace or the reignition of conflicts. My country acknowledges and praises the endeavours of United Nations personnel in Kenya, Iraq, Myanmar, northern Uganda, Somalia, Cyprus, the Central African Republic and Nepal.

The progress made in Iraq and Afghanistan should trigger renewed solidarity with the peoples of those countries. The efforts of the international community to stabilize and ensure the success of the ongoing deep transformations in Iraq and Afghanistan should be matched by renewed commitment on the part of the Iraqi and Afghan political leadership to reach compromises and comprehensive agreements allowing for political reconciliation and economic development.

Romania remains committed to the democratic future of both countries. Romania was first among the countries that are not members of the Paris Club to agree, in 2005, to the terms of debt relief for Iraq. The NATO summit held this year in Bucharest reconfirmed solidarity and engagement with Afghanistan. Any security agreements to complement or replace the current security arrangements in Iraq have to take into account the need to ensure the protection of United Nations personnel in order that the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Organization's specialized agencies, funds and programmes can properly fulfil their extended mandates in Iraq.

I should now like to say a few words about the Human Rights Council. Romania has encouraging expectations following the start of the activities of the Council's Universal Periodic Review mechanism. Under the Romanian presidency, the Council examined 32 national reports, including my country's own report. The debates generated valuable recommendations and entailed remarkable commitments with regard to the universal application of recognized international standards for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We should not weaken our support for the Human Rights Council or for the Office of the High Commissioner.

The widespread impact of humanitarian crises resulting from conflicts and natural disasters requires, again and again, our solidarity with the people in need. The tragedy of 7 million Sudanese, almost 5 million Palestinian refugees, 5 million Iraqi internally displaced persons and refugees, 3 million Afghan refugees and 1.4 million Congolese and 1 million Somali internally displaced persons should catalyse concrete actions of assistance. The recent Georgian crisis also added to the international statistics on internally displaced persons and refugees. Yet, numbers as such should not obscure in our conscience the terrible individual tragedies implied by these humanitarian catastrophes.

Aware of that plight, Romania is preparing to host a special evacuation transit centre for persons in urgent need of international protection and onward resettlement. The centre would provide temporary shelter for refugees facing immediate danger in their countries of origin, pending final resettlement in third countries.

The appalling humanitarian crises of recent decades should prompt a renewed effort to define ways to prevent and adequately react to such situations and, furthermore, to rebuild for durable conflict resolution. Further efforts should be made to forge a common understanding of the conditions and application of the principle of the responsibility to protect.

Romania resolutely promotes international cooperation in the areas of crime prevention and believes that prosecutorial services represent one of the main pillars of the criminal justice system. My country is preparing to host, in March 2009, the third world

summit of attorneys general, prosecutors general and chief prosecutors. The meeting is to be organized with the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and will focus on prosecutorial independence for effectiveness, integrity and public confidence. We look forward to welcoming the international community's representatives in Bucharest next spring.

Allow me now to turn to the issue of protracted conflicts. It has always been striking to hear the recurrent references to frozen conflicts. Let us be honest: no conflict stays frozen indefinitely without consequences. The recent crisis in Georgia proved that the international community cannot hide or shy away from dealing with uncertain situations under the assumption that they will simply disappear eventually. On the contrary, uncertain situations and grey zones gradually produce effects, effect changes in the status quo and can, from apparent tranquillity, spew forth the magma of delayed — and thus amplified — conflicts. A dormant volcano can still be an active one. Unsolved issues carrying latent threats are not socially or politically neutral, since they generate new realities and risks to stability and security.

Deferring the solution of a crisis is not a suitable answer. Only a negotiated formula, with the support of bona fide international and regional mediation and assistance, can provide long-term and enduring solutions. The crisis in South Ossetia, with its reverberations in Abkhazia and the entire State of Georgia and beyond, should focus the attention of the international community on all protracted conflicts in the area, including Transdniestria and Nagorny Karabakh.

We have to have a new energetic and comprehensive approach to the so-called protracted conflicts. It is time to jointly understand the danger and take action. The United Nations and its Security Council should play their parts and accordingly assume their responsibility. Hesitation is not helping. Full observance of all principles and norms of international law, including the territorial integrity of States, is a must for all of us if we want peace, security, stability and prosperity to prevail.

One of the main objectives of the international community should be to consolidate stabilization and a democratic future across the entire Black Sea region. Romania promotes a wide range of cooperation ideas in the Black Sea area. If we take a closer look, we can see a region with a large population, an important hub for energy and transport flows and great economic potential. The United Nations should be there to assist the region, not only in unfreezing conflicts but also in helping coastal countries to cooperate to solve problems related to pollution, illegal migration, organized crime and drug trafficking, so as to project stability and to support development.

I now turn to disarmament, non-proliferation and the fight against terrorism. I should like to underline that responsibility and solidarity are also basic pillars of the international norms in that regard. That leads me to say, as many before me have done, that statements such as the one made a few days ago in the Assembly about Israel are unacceptable.

First, every State has an essential responsibility to effectively and comprehensively implement its commitments by promoting the necessary legal framework and establishing appropriate mechanisms for verification and control.

Secondly, there is a need for solidarity and cooperation at the regional and multilateral levels so that national measures and actions are recognized and implemented. Romania has always demonstrated its interest and readiness to work together with all States members of the international community in that respect. The most recent proof of that is the contribution of my country to the seven-nation initiative on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation launched by Norway in 2005. Concrete examples of our involvement include the international seminar on how the Black Sea region can contribute to improved global security, which was hosted in Bucharest in 2007, and other activities aimed at promoting the objectives of that cross-regional initiative.

(*spoke in French*)

Allow me to conclude by calling for effective multilateralism and the strengthening of the United Nations. After all, some questioned the relevance of the United Nations after the end of the cold war. The Organization has never lacked for criticism or scepticism. We do not believe the issue to be one of trying to regain a sense of lost purpose. The United Nations continues to be the broadest and most inclusive Organization in the world and enjoys a special reputation and legitimacy. The United Nations provides a forum for all Member States — large or

small, rich or poor, developed or developing — to have their voices heard and heeded.

Instead, the question for all Member States is how to make the world Organization and its specialized agencies, funds and programmes more effective, responsible and coherent in the face of new and ongoing challenges. If the moral imperative that should lead us to carry out our responsibilities and demonstrate solidarity in order to advance the cause of humankind is not enough, then what we need is to look towards the pragmatic aspect, namely, the utility and sense implied in the fact that the world's well-being contributes to the well-being of our own countries and citizens.

History is a good teacher, provided we learn from its lessons. History shows us the virtues of joint efforts and the benefits of cooperation. We are still far from the Kantian dream of a stable world order that is democratic and prosperous. But we can move ever closer to it through multilateralism and the strengthening of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Aïchatou Mindaoudou, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and African Integration of the Niger.

Ms. Mindaoudou (Niger) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, Sir, I should like to warmly congratulate you on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session, which undeniably reflects the high esteem that the international community has for your country of Nicaragua, which is a friend of Niger. Your election is also the well-deserved culmination of an exemplary diplomatic and political career. The length and breadth of your experience makes you the right person to carry out the demanding and noble task entrusted to you. Allow me to assure you of my delegation's commitment to extending to you our constant support during your time in office. Niger is particularly honoured to be working side by side with you as a Vice-President of the Assembly for the sixty-third session.

May I also pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for the exemplary manner in which he led the sixty-second session and, in particular, for having grappled with the burning issues of the day, including the food and energy crises and climate change. With regard to His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, I should like to express our full appreciation for the significant progress on fundamental issues made by the Organization under his guidance.

The subject you have chosen, Mr. President, as the central theme of the general debate during this session is highly relevant. For several months and to varying degrees, all members of the international community have been affected by the overall rise in food prices. That crisis has gripped the attention of every international body. Mr. Olivier de Schutter, Special Rapporteur on the right to food, was far-sighted in sounding an alarm during a press conference held here at the United Nations in which he identified the initial structural causes and called for international action. Aware of the urgency of the situation, the Secretary-General set up the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis in order to provide a comprehensive and unified respond, support Governments and peoples affected and adopt a Comprehensive Framework for Action to meet the challenges.

The Government of Niger would like to congratulate the Secretary-General on his initiatives. We would also like to warmly congratulate his Task Force for their work and for taking into consideration the numerous efforts and views on this issue. The challenge now is to implement the recommendations in order to save entire groups of people in the world's most vulnerable countries from the tragedy of hunger.

For its part, Niger has taken major specific measures to address the sharp rise in the cost of basic foodstuffs in order to mitigate the effects on the living conditions of the most vulnerable people.

However, in a country facing the recurrent problem of drought and its consequences for agricultural production, the truth is that only lasting solutions will help us to counter the effects of the phenomenon and to progressively eliminate the uncertainty that characterizes Niger's production system.

The Government of Niger has therefore decided to give priority to the three programmes introduced at the Doha Conference on Consolidating Food Self-sufficiency in Niger, which was held in June 2007. Those programmes are all the more promising given the potential boon to agriculture as a result of the upcoming construction of the Khandaji dam on the Niger River. The Government will develop its

approach on the basis of that project and those programmes so as to provide credible response to meet the food needs of the people of Niger.

The international financial crisis, which is affecting many countries and is today being exacerbated by the globalization of the world in which we live, requires that we harness our efforts and initiatives to find solutions requiring commitment on the part of us all. While rich countries fear the risk of widespread economic recession, the poorest countries fear food insecurity caused by prices they can no longer afford. Paradoxically, when it comes to the financial crisis and the consequences of climate change, it is the poorest countries that always pay most dearly for the turbulence affecting the globalized world. My delegation therefore supports the proposals made by President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, which were previously espoused by President Lula da Silva of Brazil, calling on the international community to deal urgently with the issue.

We also hold out hope that the upcoming Doha Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development will produce results that include safety net measures to protect the poorest countries from external shocks that could compound their vulnerabilities.

Although the food, energy and financial crises are front and centre on the international stage, there are also other challenges facing the international community in the areas of peace, security, development and human rights, among others. We must acknowledge the fact that international peace and security has been as sorely tested by conflicts as by other scourges that are equally devastating to the harmonious development of peoples and countries throughout the world. Those scourges include international terrorism, drug trafficking and the illegal trade in small arms.

Niger is especially concerned about the impact of trafficking in drugs and weapons; and especially mines, throughout the Sahelo-Saharan strip. The actions of certain armed groups are the true cause of the unrest prevailing in the northern part of our territory. Their activities are increasingly being brought under control thanks to steps taken by the relevant institutions of our country. We therefore believe that there is a need for increased willingness and cooperation in this area, similar to that demonstrated in connection with the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy that we adopted in 2006. While we acknowledge that some progress has been made, we must also say that further efforts and commitments are needed from the international community in supporting countries in conflict or emerging from it.

It is important that we support the progress made in countries where, happily, peace is becoming more entrenched, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic, which was recently inscribed on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission. We welcome in particular the resumption of the national peace and reconciliation process in Côte d'Ivoire following the invaluable impetus provided by the Ouagadougou Agreement in 2007. In that regard, my country congratulates and encourages all Ivorian politicians on their commitment to peace. We hope that, with the support of their partners, whose invaluable contributions my delegation also commends, the national peace and reconciliation process will culminate in the holding of the upcoming presidential elections.

We also welcome the resumption of the Manhasset cycle of negotiations as a useful and necessary step in the search for a mutually acceptable and lasting solution to the issue of Western Sahara.

With regard to the Great Lakes region, my delegation welcomes the entry into force, on 21 June 2008, on the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region. We believe that this instrument will enable States parties to address the underlying causes of conflict and to address the challenges they face in the areas of security, governance and development. We also believe that the Pact is part and parcel of the new vision for the settlement of conflicts in Africa, perfect examples of which have just been provided by Nigeria and Cameroon with the resolution of the issue of the Bakassi peninsula, and by Gabon and Equatorial Guinea with the agreement on a mediation process in connection with their territorial dispute.

Nevertheless, conflicts persist in Africa and the Middle East that require appropriate involvement by the international community. With regard to the situation in the Sudan, my delegation welcomes the appointment Mr. Djibril Yipènè Bassolé, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso, as the Joint African Union-United Nations Chief Mediator for

Darfur. We are certain that Mr. Bassolé will provide new momentum and help to improve the situation in that brotherly country by, among other things, facilitating the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, signed in January 2006 between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army with regard to the Southern Sudan, and by helping to find an acceptable solution for Darfur.

With regard to Somalia, we welcome the agreement signed on 9 June in Djibouti between the Transitional Federal Government and the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia. We urge the United Nations to do everything possible to support those countries, both by more effectively backing the African Union Mission in Somalia and by deploying an international peacebuilding or peacekeeping force.

The bilateral negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians that have begun in the context of the commitments undertaken at the Annapolis Conference are a genuine source of satisfaction for my delegation. We believe that the parties should take advantage of those negotiations. We therefore encourage them to maintain the momentum of Annapolis, which reflected the willingness of the parties concerned to make progress towards peace. We should also like to welcome the recent initiative of President Nicolas Sarkozy of France in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference. We fervently hope that all those measures will make it possible to reach a speedy agreement that enshrines the vision of the two-State solution of Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders and on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the Arab peace initiative and the Quartet's road map.

We welcome the Doha agreement on Lebanon, which confirmed the virtue of dialogue and cleared the path for speedy presidential elections and the establishment of a Government. The international community should support the Lebanese people who, through that agreement, have demonstrated their political maturity and ongoing desire for national unity.

The various peace processes now underway will not be successful unless confidence-building measures are first put in place. In that regard, there is a crucial need to find solutions to the issues of disarmament, non-proliferation and the eradication of the trade in small arms. That is especially true for the poorest countries, who pay a heavy price in conflicts sustained by the trade in small arms and light weapons. My delegation therefore deplores the failure at the past session of the Disarmament Commission, another in a series due to the lack of consensus on the agenda.

As we have seen, the challenges in the area of international peace and security are numerous and complex. Unfortunately, for some of us they are accentuated by other serious, recurring and even chronic threats. As the 2005 World Summit acknowledged in its Outcome Document, those threats, which also have an effect on development, are closely linked to other areas in which the United Nations is active, namely, peace, security and human rights.

We therefore believe that the year 2008 is critical, given that it is replete with major events that could contribute to development. I am referring to the Doha Round of trade negotiations, which are at a standstill today; the high-level event on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) midpoint to the target date for their implementation, the Accra High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness; and the Review Conference of the Monterrey Consensus on financing for development.

In the quest for global well-being, Africa and countries in special circumstances — especially least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island States — deserve focused attention commensurate with their situation. My delegation would like to pay homage to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his personal commitment and unwavering support for initiatives in that regard intended to benefit Africa. Following the G8 Summit at Heiligendamm, the Secretary-General established the Africa Steering Group to monitor the achievement of the MDGs in Africa. With the support of a working group, the Steering Group is responsible for finding ways to coordinate and rationalize efforts associated with technical and financial assistance in order to speed up Africa's progress. That initiative is very timely for a country like Niger, whose strategy to reduce poverty and speed up development for the period 2009-2012 focuses precisely on the achievement of the MDGs. Moreover, the various efforts of the Government in recent years in the areas of health, education and access to water have already led to a significant improvement in the relevant indicators.

The recommendations of the Steering Group and the conclusions of the recent high-level meeting on the MDGs, jointly organized by the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, provide a very clear course of action for making progress.

Sustainable development is the main theme of the Economic and Social Council's 2008 substantive session. The current debate has clearly shown that such development cannot be achieved without appropriate funding, aid effectiveness and good governance.

In conclusion, the delegation of Niger believes that the United Nations is the world's premier forum. It must serve as a beacon in those times of both hope and uncertainty, and ensure collective security in the world by means of economic, social and cultural cooperation. That is why we need genuine reform of the United Nations system. My delegation believes that the reform effort will remain incomplete unless there is a significant change in the Security Council, including as regards both equitable representation and its working methods.

In numerous other areas currently under consideration — such as, among others, evaluating the experiences of countries involved in pilot programmes on system-wide coherence and revitalizing the General Assembly, which we must ensure — my country will contribute as much as it can to adapting our common Organization to the challenges we all face in building a world of peace, prosperity and development.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.